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Navigating Uncharted Childhood in the Absence of Parental Anchor

Arlyn M. Donaire, Remele L. Ente, Roger Paul Fuentes, Ryann B. LaBad, Maria Elizabeth N. Lebosada, & Maryjane B. Omandam
Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Philippines

Abstract

This is a qualitative study on children growing up in the absence of both parents focusing on their childhood experiences. Given that the study aimed to explore and interpret the personal experiences of children growing up without parental anchors, a phenomenological design will allow to delve deeply into their subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to these experiences. This particularly focused on the children's relationship with their parents or guardians and peers, their perceived challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations in life. This involved 12 orphans and LBC in Misamis Occidental aging 11 to 17 years, all attending basic education. The study employed semi-structured interviews with interview protocol developed by the researchers of this study. The findings underscore the resilience and adaptability of children facing familial adversity, highlighting the pivotal role of extended family members or guardians in providing stability, care, and guidance. While challenges such as emotional struggles and societal comparisons persist, participants demonstrate a remarkable capacity for coping and maintaining hopeful outlooks for the future.

Keywords: parental anchor, left behind children, childhood without parents, parental absence

For correspondence regarding this article:[*]

[*]RYANN B. LABAD
Teacher II
Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades
Maningcol, Ozamiz City, Philippines 7200
+63 908 992 2797 | (088) 531-4084
ryann.labad@sccpag.edu.ph

1. Background of the Study

One out of three Filipino youth grew up without parents according to a study conducted by the University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) in 2022. It has been determined that the most prevalent reasons for growing up in the absence of biological parents are having parents' migration, separation, and death (Kabamalan, 2022).

This study aimed to determine the lived experiences of children in navigating their uncharted childhood in the absence of parental anchors. While there are existing studies on the effects of the lack of parental anchors on children's mental health, education, and social behavior, this study further aimed to understand these determined factors from the children's perspective. Furthermore, it is expected that the results would clarify the actual experiences and perceptions of children growing up apart the warmth of care from biological parents by conducting a qualitative study on select Filipino children in the province of Misamis Occidental. This focused on the children's relationships with their caregivers or guardians and peers, as well as their challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations in life.

This study would provide information on the childhood experiences of children raised in the absence of biological parents deprived of parental anchors. This particularly focused on the children's relationship with their parents or guardians and peers, their perceived challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations in life.

2. Literature Review

Various studies, both local and abroad, shed light of the effects of biological parents' absence on the different aspects of childhood and later life, particularly, in physical and mental health, social behavior, and education. Parental absence contributes to the child's wellbeing beyond what is already accounted for by conventional adverse childhood experiences, highlighting its distinct influence (Annor et al., 2024). According to UNICEF (2021), children lacking parental care may suffer enduring physical, psychological, emotional, and social harm, leading to lifelong consequences.

2.1. On Physical Health

Pajaron and colleagues (2020) explained that children of migrant parents exhibit lower rates of illness and irritability in contrast to offspring of non-migrant parents. Additionally, left behind girls are less prone to physical illness than their boy counterparts, regardless of whether they reside in households led by males or females.

However, a study in China (Jiang et al., 2023) found out that being raised without parental presence in the household can profoundly impact children's physical and mental health in later life, leading to adverse outcomes, which further expounds that compared with boys, girls are more inclined to the inequality of being cared for. Similarly, a study in the United Kingdom (Lacey et al., 2018) declared that parental absence was associated with early uptake of risky health behaviors.

Furthermore, parental care is substantially essential during infancy and childhood in mitigating the long-term negative impacts on the child's physical and mental growth and

development (Yang et al., 2022). Similarly, another study claims that girls residing in foster homes or with alternative caregivers exhibit notably higher body mass index (BMI), while psychosomatic complaints are notably elevated in families with stepparents, foster homes, and among girls living with someone else (Steppan et al., 2019).

Furthermore, additionally, a study in China by Zhou et al. (2018) declared results which suggest that the deterioration of depressive symptoms in left behind children (LBC) is attributed to reduced care, and the effect could not be mitigated by increased household income.

2.2. On Psychological Health

Parental absence during childhood is significantly correlated with adverse mental health outcomes and substance use in young adulthood, including higher odds of experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress, regardless of gender or sex (Annor et al., 2024). The emotional effects of parental migration are profound, leading many adolescents to experience profound sadness and a strong desire for physical presence (Rendeza, 2017).

Additionally, according to Fatima et al., (2021), adolescents living with guardians reported higher levels of perceived loneliness than those living with their parents. In Yang et al. (2022), a longer period of parental absence in children correlates to a higher depression score in later life. Also, parental absence increases the likelihood of children to engage in substance use (Annor et al., 2024), particularly, smoking and drinking alcohol (Lacey et al., 2018), and criminal involvement (Wasserman, 2020).

In contrast, a study (Høgenes & Daling, 2023) claims that higher levels of parental presence appear to boost life satisfaction among adolescents, with parental support acting as a mediator between perceived absence and satisfaction. It is important for parents to recognize that providing support remotely, such as through phone calls or text messages, may not have the same effect as being physically present.

Thus, being raised without both a father and a mother may reduce levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and happiness (Kabamalan, 2022). Consequently, it can be clarified that growing up with the parents is essential to the mental wellbeing of children.

2.3. On Academics

The study of Pajaron et al. (2020) presented promising findings that children of migrants demonstrate higher educational attainment and better study habits, with lower rates of poor grades and work involvement. Additionally, LBC residing in female headed households are less likely to achieve poor grades and more likely to reach higher grade levels. Also, in a paper of Rendeza (2017), the result show that despite lacking parental assistance with homework and facing additional responsibilities at home, left behind adolescents generally maintain good academic performance. While this might be the case, though it is quite positive in a sense, numerous studies negate such findings.

A study in Vietnam argued that children from two parent families have a better chance of enrolling at all levels of education than those from single parent families (Nguyen, 2022). While this is true to children with a parent present, it could be worse to children growing up without both. Kabamalan (2022) declared in a report that without both a father and a

mother is associated with an increased probability of early school dropout, teenage pregnancy, and cohabitation.

Moreover, children who lack both parents are significantly more prone to academic underachievement in both Chinese and mathematics compared to their peers (Fu et al., 2017). Similarly, poor educational outcome is found to be consequent to growing up without both biological, married parents (Wasserman, 2020). Furthermore, Yang et al. (2022) declared that a longer period of parental absence could result to lower test scores in mathematics.

In conclusion, while the presented corpus delineates the effects on physical, psychological and educational statuses of parental absence in children, this study will expound the perspectives on caregiver or guardian and peer relations, experienced challenges and aspired plans in life of children growing up with the absence of parental anchors.

3. Method

This is a qualitative study on children growing up in the absence of both parents focusing on their childhood experiences. Given that the study aims to explore and interpret the personal experiences of children growing up without parental anchors, a phenomenological design will allow to delve deeply into their subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to these experiences. The central tenets of both descriptive and interpretative phenomenology focus on individuals' subjective experiences, the meanings they attach to their lived experiences, and their relationship with their world (Langdridge, 2008 as cited in Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

3.1. Research Environment

This study involved orphans and LBC in Misamis Occidental. Misamis Occidental is a 2nd class province in Northern Mindanao region in the Republic of the Philippines. The province covers an area of 2,006.63 km^2. According to the 2020 Census of Population and Housing, it has a population of 617,333. The population density is calculated at 308 inhabitants per square kilometer (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2021). The province has three component cities and 14 municipalities. It is mostly hilly and mountainous and coastal in the eastern side.

According to a report (Bigornia, 2022), the gross provincial domestic product (GPDP) of Misamis Occidental in 2021 is valued at 111.2 billion Philippine pesos. The main contributors to the 2021 GPDP were: wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; construction; and financial and insurance activities. Its major economic industries include agriculture, forestry and fishing, industry, and services. Hence, being a 2nd class, the province seems to be an economically fairly progressive area.

3.2. Selection of Participants

The participants of this study involved 12 children living away from their biological parents with age ranging from 11 to 17 years, all attending basic education. There were nine females and three males, coming from various family income statuses, eight studying in

public schools and four in private, and all of them live with blood relatives. Additionally, seven of the participants are in elementary school, four in junior high school, and one in senior high school.

The participants were selected through availability. Availability sampling, also known as convenience sampling, is a method of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling which involves selecting individuals from the target population based on practical considerations, such as their easy accessibility, proximity, availability, or willingness to participate at a given time, rather than through random selection (Etikan et al, 2015).

3.3. Data Gathering and Analysis

The study employed semi-structured interviews with interview protocol developed by the researchers of this study. The interview protocol was evaluated and validated with the help of the researchers' colleagues and advisers in the Graduate School Department of Saint Columban College, Pagadian City.

The participants were selected based on availability. Only identified children living without or away from their biological parents were considered. Each participant was informed to be interviewed as part of a research. An assent was presented to each participant before conducting the interview explaining the purpose of the research and that the participant may decline to participate or withdraw and discontinue participation anytime.

During the interview proper, the participant was ensured to be in a safe, comfortable and private venue. The participants were asked first with the generic questions: describe your experiences with your caregivers or guardians; how is your relationship with your peers; what challenges do you encounter as a child growing up without or away from your biological parents; how do you cope up with the challenges; and what are your dreams and future plans. Then the answers were probed by asking specific questions.

After the interview, the responses were transcribed as reported speech, not verbatim. Then the participants were informed about the transcription to confirm the accuracy of the written report.

Thematic analyses and thorough discussions were conducted among the researchers. After which, the research report was written, reviewed and readied for submission.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to the codes and policies for research ethics established by the Saint Columban College and to the ethical considerations set by the UK Statistics Authority (2022).

1. The use of data offers advantages for users and contributes to the public good.
2. The identity of the data subject, whether an individual or an organization, is safeguarded, with information kept confidential and secure, and the matter of consent is properly addressed.
3. The risks and limitations of new technologies are taken into account, and adequate human oversight ensures that the methods used align with established standards of integrity and quality.

4. The data used and methods employed comply with legal requirements, including the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act (RA 7610), and other applicable local and international laws.
5. Public opinions are taken into account regarding the data used and the perceived advantages of the research.
6. The access, use, and sharing of data are conducted transparently and communicated to the public in a clear and accessible manner.

Moreover, the researchers took careful considerations in interviewing the participants who are children of age ranging from 11 to 16 years old. The researchers prepared an assent that emphasized that the participants should agree that their participation is optional and voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation anytime, and additionally, that their data should be used exclusively for this research. Furthermore, a parental consent was also prepared in case the participants opted to ask informed consent from their parents.

Above all, no personal identifying information was gathered and used to ensure confidentiality of and protection for the participants. It is ensured that no participant is forced, coerced, obliged, or deceived to participate in this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym.

4. Results and Findings

To protect the identity of the participants each one of them was given a pseudonym. Furthermore, the data and results presented are transcribed as reported rather than direct speech or verbatim form.

4.1. Results

Presented herein are the participants' brief biographical profile, followed by their reported responses gathered from the semi-structured interviews.

Alyssa

Alyssa is an 11-year-old female Grade 5 pupil. Since last year, her parents have entrusted her and her two brothers to her aunt, who is her mother's cousin. Due to financial constraints, her married parents were forced to work in Saudi Arabia. Fortunately, their aunt treated them well, ensuring that their educational and basic needs were covered at both school and home.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She remembered that when her parents left, her aunt took them out for dinners and outings. When she missed her parents, her aunt would notice and they would have a reassuring talk, during which she was advised to stop sobbing because her parents had left for their future.

Relationship with Peers. She has a close bond with her siblings. She sometimes reprimands her younger brother for misbehaving, and when he weeps, her aunt would recommend her to discipline him gently rather than physically punishing him. She also has a close relationship with her older brother, who treated her nicely.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. She often finds herself caught up in the typical disagreements with her siblings, just like any other family, and during those times, she would sometimes feel a deep longing for her parents.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. She deals with her problems by pursuing solutions on her own and accepting responsibility for her faults, expressing apologies when necessary. She would occasionally cry and confide in her aunt about her unhappiness and worries. Fortunately, her aunt is always there to encourage her through it all.

Dreams and Future Plans. She promised herself that whenever she would be financially independent and capable of helping out, she would gladly support her aunt. This commitment originated from her gratitude to her aunt for the compassion she had shown her and her siblings. It was not just about repaying a debt, it was about appreciating her aunt's love and care throughout the years. She recognized the value of family support and was motivated to repay the generosity she had received. So, when the opportunity occurs, she would seize it eagerly, confident that she could make a significant difference in her aunt's life, just as her aunt did for her.

Chloe

Chloe is a 16-year-old female in Grade 11. She has been living with her grandmother in a fair-income household since the age of six, following the death of her mother. Despite her father's estrangement from her mother's family and his lack of support, Chloe is well-supported financially and emotionally by her aunts and uncles.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She resides with her maternal grandmother, who, along with her aunts and uncles, provides for her financially. Despite the evident love from her caregiver, whom she affectionately calls "Mama," she grapples with feelings of longing and discontent. She yearns for the opportunity to have grown up with her biological parents, despite never having known her mother. Moreover, she harbors resentment toward her father, who now resides with his own family in a neighboring barangay and fails to offer any form of support.

Relationship with Peers. She lives with five cousins who are all girls of her age. Despite having no sibling, she disclosed that she was better off alone with her “mama”. She always gets in quarrel with her cousins for reasons of using her clothes without permission and doing unassigned household chores. She is easy and outgoing at school and she has a lot of friends, but none would she consider as close as a sister. She claimed that she was fine on her own.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. Sometimes she feels envy with other children for having their own parents especially when there are school activities like recognition day and PTA (Parents-Teachers Association) meetings. She feels loneliness at times.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. She consoles herself from loneliness and envy by telling herself that she is luckier than most of her peers that she has a loving “mama”, aunts, uncles and “mommyla” (her grandmother’s sister) whom she can run to anytime when she is at quarrel with her cousins at home or even when she is simply feeling lonely.

Dreams and Future Plans. She has not decided any course in college or any profession to pursue. She said that she just wanted to work abroad, any work, and live away from her hometown.

Cyrill

Cyrill is an 11-year-old male in Grade 5. For the past five years, he and his brother have been living with their aunt, their father's younger sister. This arrangement became necessary after their father was incarcerated due to drug-related issues. Cyrill's mother has been working abroad for a significant period, providing financial support from afar. Both his mother and aunt contribute to covering the household expenses, ensuring that Cyrill and his brother have a stable and supportive environment despite the challenges posed by their family's circumstances.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. He recalls his aunt's kind care for them, which includes regular meals and interesting adventures. He openly expresses his gratitude, feeling privileged because his aunt carefully looks after them, ensuring that their every need is met.

Relationship with Peers. He and his brother share a close bond, constantly engaging in humorous banter, teasing each other, and participating in various hobbies together. Their bond extends beyond the two of them; they have wonderful interactions with their cousins, which foster strong ties within the family circle.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. When he misses his mother, there is no simple solution to soothe the pain of her absence. It is especially difficult since his father's health is deteriorating and their finances are tight.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. When difficulties come, he finds relief in spending time with friends and releasing his emotions in their presence. He occasionally confides in his brother, who always provides him with helpful advice and encouragement.

Dreams and Future Plans. He wanted to be financially stable and help his brother, aunt, and parents.

Daphne

Daphne is an 11-year-old female, a Grade 6 pupil. She lives with her grandfather and her six-year-old younger brother, with additional support from her aunt. The family primarily relies on financial assistance from Daphne's mother, who works abroad. Meanwhile, Daphne's father, who is involved with another woman, does not provide any financial support. Despite these challenges, Daphne's family strives to create a nurturing and stable environment for her and her brother.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She grew up without the presence of her parents but found solace in the nurturing care of her maternal grandfather. Reflecting on her upbringing, she fondly recalls a childhood imbued with joy, affection, and cherished moments.

Relationship with Peers. She labels her relationship with her peers as "good" due to the strong rapport she shared with them. However, there were times in her life when she

yearns for the presence of a complete family. However, this does not hinder her from forming friendships and finding enjoyment in her life.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. She grappled with her emotions in the aftermath of her parents' breakup, lacking guidance and support. Feeling insecure, she struggled to express her feelings, even to her grandfather. She expressed, “I'll handle my issues solo if I have to.” However, she would also try her best to communicate with her aunt or mother and express her problems or challenges that she is facing.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. She expresses her intention to seek solace and encouragement from her friends to pursue happiness and joy, despite feeling sad and tired. She will confide in her aunt about her challenges, receiving both support and encouragement. Her aunt reassures her that she is capable of overcoming them.

Dreams and Future Plans. She expressed her desire to become a flight attendant and travel to various destinations worldwide. Her family encouraged her, noting that her height, slender physique, and beauty made her well-suited for the role. This encouragement motivated her to pursue a career as a flight attendant, enabling her to support and give back to those who have supported and guided her through life's challenges.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a 12-year-old female, a Grade 6 pupil. She resides with her grandparents, who provide for the household through the grandmother's pension from her career as a retired educator and the grandfather's income from operating a tricycle. When Elizabeth was eight, her mother remarried, and her father became involved in an extramarital affair. Both parents have contributed financially, with her mother's support being more substantial. However, Elizabeth has lacked emotional, physical, and mental nurturance from her parents, relying on her grandparents for stability and care.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She grew up without her parents by her side. She was raised and cared for by her grandparents on her father’s side. She described her childhood with them as joyful, filled with love, appreciation, and beautiful memories. However, everything changed when her father was released from prison and visited home drunk, harassing her grandparents. This was the most traumatizing experience she had ever faced. Despite her father's troublesome behavior and her mother's decision to marry another man and left, she still longs for a happy and complete family, though she believes it may never be possible.

Relationship with Peers. She described her relationship with her peers as “okay, sometimes not okay” because she often felt alone, especially when she knew them with complete and happy families. At times, she wished her own family was not broken, feeling envious of theirs. As a result, she sometimes struggles with trust issues or having difficulty forming close bonds with her peers.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. She experiences struggles with her emotions because she has no one to turn to for guidance and support after her parents broke up. She feels insecure and finds it difficult to communicate her emotions, even with her grandparents. She even said, “If I can still manage my problems, I will deal with it by myself."

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. She would try various methods to find happiness whenever she faced hardships, like going back to the things that made her happy. Usually, she avoids discussing her troubles, but when they become too overwhelming, she would confide in her grandmother and seek her advice to navigate through life.

Dreams and Future Plans. She mentioned wanting her grandparents to live longer so that when she has a job in the future, she can give them whatever they like and provide them with opportunities to travel to different countries around the world.

Hyacinth

Hyacinth is an 11-year-old female, a Grade 5 pupil. Raised by her grandmother from birth, Hyacinth has grown up in a loving and nurturing environment. Her biological parents were not married, and she is the middle child of three siblings, each with different fathers. Her mother, who works in Malaysia, provides financial support for the family.

They all live together in their ancestral home, where Hyacinth shares a close bond with her aunt and two cousins. This extended family setup offers her a stable and supportive upbringing.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She smiles recalling how her grandmother loves her so much. They had a really close relationship. Nevertheless, she has not spent much time in contact with her birth mother. She had once inquired her mother about her biological father but was told nothing about him.

Relationship with Peers. She loves her brother very much, and they have many happy times together. Their relationship is one of great devotion. Even though they occasionally get into small arguments and even a few fights, as the day goes on, they always find comfort in each other's understanding, their disagreements dissolving in the warmth of their sibling love.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. She grapples with insecurity, believing her mother favors her older brother. Managing these feelings proves challenging. Yet, she finds solace in her aunt, her mother's sister, who offers invaluable support. Trust is another hurdle; she fears her friends may gossip behind her back in her absence.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. When problems occur, she confides in her grandmother and aunt for guidance. Occasionally, she keeps personal problems to herself, believing they will eventually pass.

Dreams and Future Plans. She vows to shower her grandmother with abundant love and care, as she is resolute in ensuring her well-being. Believing herself to be the kind of person who will steadfastly stand by her grandma and aunt, offering them companionship and support when required, she finds her purpose in prioritizing her family's welfare. Her dedication to her loved ones instills in her a sense of purpose, motivating her to always prioritize their needs. For her, being there for her family is not just a duty but also a heartfelt expression of gratitude for their unwavering support and care over the years.

Junaida

Junaida is a 14-year-old female, currently a Grade 9 student. She lives with her grandmother in a low-income household. Since early childhood, Junaida's parents have been absent, having separated and each started new families.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She lives with her grandmother on her mother's side. Her grandmother with her aunts and uncles provides for her daily needs. According to her, she is treated like a princess in the household since she is the only girl among her cousins. Also, living with them is a family of her aunt with three boys. The household is considered as low-income but her father sends money to her, he even sent her an iPhone. So, all in all, she has a great life with her guardian, grandmother, as she described.

Relationship with Peers. The closest friends she has are mostly her classmates. Some of them are her blood relatives such as cousins. She has close friends but none of them is she considers as "barkada" since she has not much time for hanging out with a tight circle. She does not claim her situation to be better nor worse than her peers but she wishes her situation was the same as most children (growing up with both parents). She discloses that she had been to a fight once but for reason unrelated to her not being with biological parents.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. She said she is experiencing typical problems of her age but none particular for being a child growing up with the absence of parental anchors.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. She mentioned that she does not particularly struggle with the absence of parental figures, aside from occasional feelings of uneasiness when wishing her situation mirrored that of most children who grow up with both parents present.

Dreams and Future Plans. She reported that she wanted to finish schooling and join the military someday.

Loy

Loy is a 15-year-old male, a Grade 8 student. He lives with his grandparent in a fair-income household. Since toddlerhood, Loy's parents have been absent, having migrated for work. Despite their physical absence, his parents remain together and provide for the family from abroad. Loy's upbringing has been shaped by the care and support of his grandmother.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. He lives with his grandmother who raised him since he was a toddler. The boy shared that his grandmother stood as his parent almost all of the times in his life. Both of his biological parents migrated abroad to work. Although he was given a weekly allowance by his real parents, he would prefer living away from them and stay with his grandmother. He felt that his actions were always restricted and he felt awkward every time the real parents were around.

Relationship with Peers. The boy shared that he has a close circle of friends and has good terms with his classmates and peers. He has never been to a fight or in any case involving bullying and, in rare occasions, got into some quarrel for non-malicious teasing.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. Since his real parents give him a weekly allowance, he never ever had any financial issue. About his personal and academic life, he stated that his grandmother is always supportive for him.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. He admitted the he could not think of anything to share about personal coping with the challenges of having absent parents since he always has his grandmother and he has good relations with his peers and friends.

Dreams and Future Plans. Loy said he wanted to become an engineer or a lawyer someday.

May-may

May-may is a 14-year-old female, a Grade 8 student. She resides with her grandparents in a low-income household. Her parents separated and left when she was a toddler, each starting new families. Despite these early challenges, May-may has been raised in a loving and supportive environment provided by her grandparents, who ensure her well-being and education.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She lives with her grandparents on her mother's side. Her grandparents provide for her, the grandfather works as a construction worker with a minimum wage income and the grandmother attends their small sari-sari store. She stated that she loves her grandparents very much but she is closer to the grandfather than the grandmother for the reason that the grandfather always protects her and takes her side whenever the grandmother scolds or have arguments with her. She said that her grandparents treat her like a real daughter and she treats them like her real parents. She helps her grandparents in the household chores and taking care of their few livestock (goats, pigs, chickens, and ducks) at their backyard. She prefers living with the current guardians than with either parent.

Relationship with Peers. Her closest friends mainly consist of her classmates, with some of them being her blood relatives, such as cousins. While she values these friendships, she does not have a tight-knit "barkada" due to limited time for socializing. She does not perceive her situation as better as or worse than her peers', but she wishes she had grown up with both parents like most children. Although she has been in a fight before, it was unrelated to her family situation. She admits to harboring resentment towards her "Ate," an older cousin, who is in Grade 11 and lives with her in her grandparents' house, for the reason primarily involving household chores.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. She mentioned experiencing typical challenges of her age, but none specifically relate to growing up without biological parents.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. She mentioned not having any specific issues related to growing up without biological parents, although she occasionally feels uneasy when wishing her situation mirrored that of most children, who have real parents present.

Dreams and Future Plans. She said she wanted to finish schooling and become a soldier or a police officer someday.

Mikaela

Mikaela is a 12-year-old female, currently a Grade 6 pupil. She lives with her grandmother and maternal aunt, who both provide her with substantial support and care. The family depends on financial assistance from Mikaela's mother, who works in Manila. Her father, involved with another woman, does not contribute financially and Mikaela has never met him in person. Despite these challenges, Mikaela thrives in the nurturing environment created by her grandmother and aunt.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She is raised by her grandmother with assistance from her aunt, and her upbringing was described as "challenging" when it comes to expressing herself, given the lack of support from her guardians.

Relationship with Peers. Her friendships are good, but she tends to gravitate towards solitary moments, finding tranquility in her own company rather than engaging in extensive conversations with friends.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. She describes living in her home as both joyful and exasperating. She finds herself inexplicably upset with her family at times, leading her to believe she struggles with anger management. Additionally, she fears reprisal for expressing her emotions openly, adding to her internal turmoil. Another challenge she faces is financial instability.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. She rarely discusses her emotional stress until it becomes overwhelming. Seeking advice from her mother is extremely rare. She occasionally turns to her grandmother, affectionately called "mama." Her approach leans towards self-reliance, opting to tackle problems with determination and resourcefulness.

Dreams and Future Plans. She aspired to pursue a career as an artist. However, her guardians opposed her dream, insisting she become a nurse, citing concerns about financial stability in the arts. Consequently, she accepted and acknowledges their wishes, intending to secure employment and assist with their financial obligations in the future.

Rendelou

Rendelou is a 14-year-old male, currently a Grade 7 student. He was raised and nurtured by his paternal aunt, who stepped in to care for him after his parents separated when he was very young. Being her only charge, Rendelou received undivided attention and care from his aunt, who did not have children of her own. Unfortunately, he lacked support from his parents, both financially and emotionally, throughout his upbringing. The family primarily relied on his aunt's income from her job as a public-school teacher to sustain the household. Rendelou admitted that he was gay.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. His reminiscence of childhood with his guardian were vivid. He fondly recalls a time when worries were few and happiness were abundant. As he come to age, he conceals his true identity, unable to express himself to his aunt for fear of rejection if she will discover his homosexuality.

Relationship with Peers. He characterizes his rapport with his peers as strained due to frequent clashes arising from his behavior. He emphasized that his voice was often unheard at home, leading him to assert himself by acting in a manner aligned with his own desires,

adopting or choosing to align his self with a particular viewpoint, approach, or behavior "I'll do what feels right for me, regardless of others' reactions."

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. Financially, his aunt provides ample support, but emotionally, he experiences a lack of openness in their household. He describes it as a situation where children are expected to remain quiet while adults converse, leaving little room for their voices to be heard.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. His way of coping involves sharing his feelings beyond his immediate family circle. He discusses his life worries with those he trusts deeply, such as a close friend with whom he feels authentic, and his Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) teacher. Occasionally, he confides in his aunt, though he tends to avoid delving into deeply personal or emotional topics with her.

Dreams and Future Plans. He is yet undecided about his future profession, though he planned to complete his education so that he could secure a good job, enabling him to repay his aunt for all her support and provide himself with the comfort of life she had always wanted for him.

Sofia

Sofia, an 11-year-old Grade 5 student, faced upheaval when her parents were detained for drug-related issue, leading to her and her little brother's placement in the care of their father's sister. Terrified and depressed by the ordeal, Sofia found solace in her aunt's unwavering kindness and support. Despite the challenges, her aunt provides for their needs, guiding Sofia through the turmoil and helping her make sense of the circumstances.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians. She recalls her aunt's generosity and affection toward her and her brother. They frequently go out with their cousins to have fun. Her aunt is the first to comfort her whenever she starts sobbing when she misses her parents.

Relationship with Peers. She is close with her brother and their cousins. Though they occasionally quarrel and get into fights, they always make up and reestablish their friendship.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors. Although she is close with her brother and their cousins, they would get into some quarrel sometimes. She struggles in conflict resolution and emotional regulation when these quarrels with her brother and their cousins come.

Coping Mechanisms on Challenges. Sometimes, when faced with difficulties, she would figure them out on her own and cry. She has times when she would feel overburdened and would have to take care of everything by herself. On some occasions, she would speak with her aunt and her closest friend. She would feel better after talking to them about her concerns and issues. Her aunt would give her consoling counsel and assurance, and her best friend is there to listen and encourage her at all times. She would feel less alone and able to deal with her problems, thanks to these talks.

Dreams and Future Plans. She aims to support her aunt by meeting her needs and showing her with the same kindness she received when she starts her own family in the future. She is determined to repay her aunt's kindness, recalling the love and support she received during challenging times. Her goal is to ensure her aunt has everything she needs

and feels appreciated as an adult. She intends to treat her aunt with the same love and support she received, motivated by her gratitude and respect for her aunt's past generosity.

4.2. Findings

Presented herein are the analyses and interpretation of the results obtained from the semi-structured interview on the participants vis-à-vis the main research questions.

What are the childhood experiences of children with their caregivers or guardians?

The children experience various dynamics with their caregivers or guardians and navigate their childhoods with unique challenges and coping mechanisms:

Alyssa, Chloe, and Sofia find comfort in the care provided by their aunts during their parents' absence due to work or incarceration. Despite the longing for their parents, they appreciate the love and support they receive from their extended family.

Cyrill and Hyacinth cherish the nurturing environment provided by their aunts and grandparents, respectively, in the absence of parental figures. They build strong bonds with siblings and cousins, finding solace and support within their family circle.

Daphne, Elizabeth, May-may, and Mikaela face emotional struggles stemming from parental separation or absence. While Daphne seeks solace in her grandfather and aunt, Elizabeth finds stability in her grandparents but grapples with past traumas. May-may yearns for a complete family but finds solace in her grandparents' love, while Mikaela navigates her emotions with limited support from her grandmother and aunt.

Loy and Junaida experience financial stability from their absent parents but lack emotional support. Loy thrives under his grandmother's care, while Junaida seeks companionship among friends and dreams of joining the military.

Rendelou struggles with his identity as a gay adolescent and finds limited emotional support in his aunt's household. Despite financial stability, he feels unheard and turns to trusted friends and teachers for guidance.

The children exhibit resilience and adaptability, drawing strength from their familial bonds and finding ways to cope with their challenges, whether through seeking support from caregivers, confiding in friends, or pursuing personal aspirations for a better future.

How do children describe their relationship with peers in the absence of parental anchor?

Based on the responses, children describe their relationships with peers in the absence of parental anchors in various ways, influenced by their individual circumstances and coping mechanisms:

Alyssa maintains a close bond with her siblings and occasionally feels a deep longing for her parents during disagreements. She finds comfort in confiding in her aunt and pursues solutions independently while accepting responsibility for her actions.

Despite living with cousins, Chloe feels better off alone with her grandmother and aunt. She experiences occasional loneliness and envy towards peers with complete families but consoles herself by recognizing the love and support she receives from her family.

Cyrill shares a strong bond with his brother and cousins, finding relief from the absence of parental anchors by spending time with friends and confiding in his brother for advice and encouragement.

Despite struggling with her parents' breakup, Daphne maintains good relationships with her peers and seeks solace and encouragement from her aunt and friends to overcome challenges.

Elizabeth feels alone at times and struggles with trust issues and forming close bonds with peers. She copes by occasionally confiding in her grandmother and expressing gratitude for her support.

Hyacinth shares a close bond with her brother and aunt, finding support and stability in her extended family. She confides in her grandmother and aunt during challenging times and expresses a desire to repay their kindness in the future.

Junaida maintains good relationships with classmates and cousins but wishes for a more typical family structure. She experiences occasional feelings of uneasiness but does not face specific challenges related to the absence of parental anchors.

Loy has a supportive grandmother and good relationships with friends. He does not experience significant challenges related to the absence of his parents and focuses on his future aspirations.

May-may values her friendships but wishes for a complete family like her peers. She experiences occasional uneasiness but copes by focusing on her education and future goals.

Mikaela finds solace in her own company and struggles with expressing herself due to a lack of support from her guardians. She copes by relying on her determination and resourcefulness to tackle challenges.

Rendelou's relationships with peers are strained, and he struggles with feeling unheard at home. He copes by sharing his feelings with trusted individuals and intends to repay his aunt for her support in the future.

Sofia maintains close relationships with her brother and cousins but struggles with conflict resolution and emotional regulation. She copes by confiding in her aunt and best friend, finding comfort and reassurance through their support.

Despite facing challenges such as loneliness, envy, and trust issues, the children maintain strong bonds with siblings, cousins, and friends. They find solace in confiding in caregivers, seeking support from friends, and focusing on future aspirations. Overall, the children exhibit resilience and adaptability in navigating their circumstances, emphasizing the importance of familial and social support in overcoming challenges.

What are the challenges of children in the absence of parental anchors?

The challenges faced by children in the absence of parental anchors encompass a range of emotional, social, and practical difficulties, as revealed in the narratives of the participants. These challenges significantly impact their well-being and development, highlighting the need for targeted support and interventions to address their unique circumstances.

Emotional Struggles. One prominent challenge experienced by these children is emotional instability and insecurity stemming from the absence of parental figures. Alyssa, Chloe, Cyrill, Daphne, Elizabeth, Hyacinth, and Sofia all express feelings of loneliness, longing, and inadequacy, yearning for the love and guidance of their parents. They grapple with a sense of loss and sadness, compounded by the absence of nurturing relationships fundamental to their emotional growth.

Social Isolation. Children living without parental anchors often face challenges in forming and maintaining relationships with peers. Chloe, Daphne, Elizabeth, Hyacinth, Junaida, and Mikaela struggle with feelings of loneliness and envy as they observe their peers with intact families. They long for the companionship and support of a complete family unit, feeling isolated and disconnected from their peers who enjoy the presence of both parents.

Financial Instability. Practical obstacles also arise in the absence of parental anchors, including financial instability and limited access to resources. While some children, like Alyssa and Sofia, benefit from the support of extended family members, others, such as Chloe, Elizabeth, and May-may, face financial constraints and struggle to meet their basic needs. The absence of parental guidance further complicates their ability to navigate financial challenges and plan for their future.

Parental Absence and Role Modeling. Moreover, the lack of parental figures deprives children of positive role models and mentors to guide their behavior and decision-making. Rendelou, for instance, experiences a strained relationship with his peers due to a lack of emotional support and openness in his household. Without parental guidance, children may struggle to develop essential life skills and moral values, leading to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty about their future.

How do children cope with the challenges encountered in the absence of parental anchors?

The children demonstrate resilience, relying on familial support and personal determination to navigate the challenges of growing up without parental anchors. Their coping mechanisms vary, but they all share a common goal of building a better future for themselves and their caregivers.

Seeking Support from Caregivers and Family. Alyssa, Cyrill, Daphne, Elizabeth, Hyacinth, and Sofia all demonstrate a reliance on their caregivers or family members for support and guidance when facing challenges. They confide in them, seek reassurance, and find solace in their presence.

Independence and Self-Reliance. Alyssa and Sofia exhibit coping mechanisms that involve pursuing solutions independently and accepting responsibility for their actions. They deal with problems on their own to some extent before seeking external support.

Finding Comfort in Relationships. Chloe, Cyrill, Daphne, Elizabeth, and Hyacinth derive emotional support from their relationships with siblings, cousins, and peers. These connections offer them companionship and understanding during difficult times.

Resilience and Determination. Despite their individual circumstances, all the children display resilience and determination in coping with their challenges. They face adversity with courage and perseverance, striving to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

What are the dreams and future plans of children living with their caregivers or guardians?

The dreams and future plans of children living with caregivers or guardians highlight several common themes:

Gratitude and Reciprocity. Many children express gratitude towards their caregivers and aspire to repay their kindness in the future.

Financial Independence and Stability. There is a prevalent desire among the children to achieve financial stability and independence to overcome current challenges.

Career Aspirations and Goals. Various career aspirations are evident among the children, reflecting their hopes for personal and professional fulfillment.

Family Support and Unity. Despite family disruptions, the children value the support and unity within their extended families.

Personal Growth and Development. Each child aims for personal growth and development, striving to better their circumstances and those of their families.

Resilience and Determination. Despite facing challenges, the children exhibit resilience and determination in pursuing their dreams and creating better futures.

In essence, these themes underscore the resilience, gratitude, and aspirations of children in challenging circumstances as they work towards brighter futures.

Summary

The findings underscore the resilience and adaptability of children facing familial adversity, highlighting the pivotal role of extended family members or guardians in providing stability, care, and guidance. While challenges such as emotional struggles and societal comparisons persist, participants demonstrate a remarkable capacity for coping and maintaining hopeful outlooks for the future.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study explored the experiences and coping mechanisms of children growing up without parental anchors, relying on extended family members or guardians for support. Through qualitative analysis of individual narratives, common themes emerged regarding their relationships, challenges, coping mechanisms, and dreams for the future.

Experiences with Caregivers or Guardians

Across participants, strong bonds were evident with the individuals providing care, ranging from aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other blood-related guardians. Despite the absence of biological parents, many children expressed gratitude and affection for their caregivers, highlighting instances of love, support, and financial provision.

Relationship with Peers

Participants demonstrated varying degrees of social interaction, with some having close relationships with siblings and cousins, while others found solace in friendships outside the family circle. However, challenges such as envy or conflicts with peers were noted, stemming from the desire for a complete family structure.

Challenges in the Absence of Parental Anchors

Emotional struggles, feelings of loneliness, and yearning for parental presence were common among the participants. Instances of insecurity, envy, and difficulty in expressing emotions were noted, often linked to societal perceptions and comparisons with peers from intact families.

Coping Mechanisms

Children employed various coping strategies, including seeking solace in family members, confiding in trusted individuals, pursuing personal interests, and finding resilience in self-reliance. While some shared their concerns openly, others struggled with communication barriers or internalized their emotions.

Dreams and Future Plans

Despite their challenges, participants expressed aspirations for the future, ranging from academic and career goals to desires for familial stability and reciprocation of support. Motivated by gratitude and a sense of duty, many aimed to repay their caregivers' kindness and create better futures for themselves and their families.

5.2. Recommendations

With careful considerations, based on the findings, analyses and discussions, the researchers arrived at sound recommendations for the caregivers and/or guardians of LBC and/or orphans, as wells as, the teachers, counselors, social workers, service providers, policy-makers, and other related field.

Supportive Interventions

Implement programs aimed at bolstering emotional resilience and coping skills among children growing up without parental anchors, emphasizing the importance of open communication and seeking support from trusted individuals.

Family Strengthening Initiatives

Foster community-based initiatives that promote familial bonds and provide resources for extended families caring for children in the absence of biological parents, including access to counseling, financial assistance, and parenting support.

Education and Awareness

Raise awareness within communities and schools about the diverse family structures and experiences of children, promoting empathy, inclusivity, and support for those facing familial challenges.

Policy Advocacy

Advocate for policies that prioritize the welfare of children in non-traditional family setups, ensuring access to essential services, legal protections, and opportunities for holistic development.

By addressing these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute to fostering supportive environments and empowering children to navigate and thrive despite the absence of parental anchors.

5.3. Note for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences and coping mechanisms of children growing up without parental anchors, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the generalizability and depth of the findings. Future research in this area should consider the following:

Sample Characteristics

The participants in this study were drawn from specific demographics and cultural contexts, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to broader populations. Future studies should aim for more diverse samples to capture a wider range of experiences and perspectives.

Qualitative Nature

The qualitative nature of this study allowed for in-depth exploration of individual narratives. However, the subjective nature of qualitative data collection and analysis may introduce bias or overlook certain aspects of the participants' experiences. Combining qualitative approaches with quantitative methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Self-Reporting Bias

Participants' responses may be influenced by social desirability bias or memory recall limitations, affecting the accuracy and completeness of their accounts. Future research could employ triangulation methods or longitudinal designs to validate and supplement self-reported data.

Limited Scope

This study focused primarily on the experiences and coping mechanisms of children without parental anchors, overlooking the perspectives of caregivers or other family members involved in their upbringing. Exploring the dynamics and interactions within the extended family unit could offer additional insights into the support networks and challenges faced by children in non-traditional family structures.

Contextual Factors

The socio-cultural, economic, and environmental contexts in which children grow up play a significant role in shaping their experiences and coping strategies. Future research should consider contextual factors such as cultural norms, socioeconomic status, and community resources to provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Addressing these limitations in future research endeavors will contribute to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the experiences and needs of children growing up without parental anchors, ultimately informing the development of more effective interventions and support systems for this vulnerable population.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research. The research was conducted independently, and there are no financial or personal relationships with any individuals or organizations that could have inappropriately influenced or biased the work.

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Perceptions of Learners on Reading Enhancement during Catch-Up Fridays

Ryann B. LaBad[1] & Jean B. Alindo[2]
[1]Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades, Philippines
[2]Jose Lim Ho National High School, Philippines

Abstract

DepEd issued a memorandum requiring all public schools from Grades 1 to 12 and all community learning centers to implement Catch-up Fridays. Catch-up Fridays is a learning mechanism intended to strengthen the foundational, social, and other relevant skills necessary to actualize the intent of the basic education curriculum that shall be implemented every Friday until the end of the school year 2023-2024. This study aims to assess the reception of the Reading Enhancement by determining the perceptions and experiences of the learners. To gain a rich and in-depth understanding of how the learners perceive the implementation of RE, a focus group with semi-structured interviews was conducted. When the learners were asked how they felt about RE in general, they mostly claimed that they were enjoying the activities. The innovative approaches for conducting classes were applauded by the learners, too. However, some learners also expressed their disapproval. They declared that they would rather have regular classes over RE. When the learners were asked whether they liked or disliked having the RE program each Friday, most showed thumbs-downs. However, when the learners were asked about their expectations, they were positive that the programs on Catch-up Fridays would be beneficial to them after all. Thus, the teachers are advised to innovate and strategize beyond the recommendations of the DepEd order and memorandum. Conclusively, all stakeholders of the basic education in the nation must work together for the welfare and benefits of the learners.

Keywords: Catch-Up Fridays, DepEd Catch-Up Fridays, perceptions on reading enhancement, Reading Enhancement, Reading Enhancement on Catch-Up Fridays

For correspondence regarding this article:†

†RYANN B. LABAD
Teacher II
Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades
Maningcol, Ozamiz City 7200 PHILIPPINES
ryannlabad@iaoeinc.org

1. Introduction

On the 10th day of the month of January in the year 2024, the Department of Education (DepEd), the primary government agency mandated to govern the basic education in the Republic of the Philippines, issued a memorandum requiring all public schools from Grade 1 to 12 (elementary and secondary) and all community learning centers to implement the Catch-up Fridays. Catch-up Fridays is a learning mechanism intended to strengthen the foundational, social, and other relevant skills necessary to actualize the intent of the basic education curriculum that shall be implemented on every Friday starting from the 12th day of January 2024 until the end of the school year 2023-2024 (DepEd Memorandum No. 001, s. 2024).

One of the main features of the Catch-up Fridays, in fact the grandest, taking up the schedule for the first half of the day with a 140-minute time allotment, is the operationalization of the National Reading Program (NRP), a subprogram of the National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP). The NRP is both a core reading curriculum and a supplementary initiative aimed at improving literacy standards through enhancement, intervention, and remediation that harmonizes all reading programs implemented in the DepEd schools (DepEd Order no. 013, s. 2023).

Being a secondary school institution of DepEd, the Jose Lim Ho National High School in Calabayan, Ozamiz City, in compliance with the mandates of the agency, implemented Catch-up Fridays in its campus involving the Grade 7 up to the Grade 10 (junior high school) and the Grade 11 and Grade 12 (senior high school) levels. With regard to operationalizing the NRP, two reading groups were determined in the school, namely, the Reading Intervention (RI) and the Reading Enhancement (RE) groups. The first group has been intended for the learners who were identified to have lower reading comprehension skills while the latter has been intended for the learners who were identified to have average to advanced reading comprehension skills.

This study aims to assess the reception of the RE by the learners by determining the perceptions and experiences of the Grade 11 learners at the Jose Lim Ho National High School. While the Catch-up Fridays has been running for more than two months, there has been a dearth of studies conducted and published in its relevance. Despite there are news features published by the Philippine Information Agency and the Philippine News Agency—both owned by the Philippine government, no official or formal study regarding the perceptions of the learners is available at hand. Moreover, this undertaking intends to shed light on the learners' reception of RE during the Catch-up Fridays for the school administrators, teachers, policy- and decision-makers to devise strategies and impactful decisions on the program for the benefit of the learners.

2. Literature Review

As claimed by a school teacher in a news article, the Catch-up Fridays came as a challenge for both teachers and learners (Bermudez, 2024) despite having a good initial

impression as having both teachers and learners "happy and engaged," as claimed by the DepEd's Curriculum and Teaching Strand (Bacelonia, 2024). In consistency with the guides and strategies suggested in DepEd Order no. 013, s. 2023, the learner experience of the Catch-up Fridays would be tailored to their needs and integrative with other various learning areas, particularly in health, values education and peace education.

Elladora & Dioso (2023) contend in their paper that language proficiency must go hand-in-hand with literary competence. Literary competence involves various abilities and understandings crucial for comprehending texts. Learners need competencies such as contextual understanding, reading strategies, literary analysis, and textual knowledge to develop it. Moreover, in the digital era, digital literacy skills are essential for effectively engaging with and evaluating digital texts, adding a new dimension to literary competence. It is, therefore, reasonable that teachers must employ various strategies beyond the suggestions provided by the DepEd order and memorandum to cater to the complex aspects of literary competence should they aim to enhance the reading skills of the learners.

Aside from employing varied approaches and strategies, it is also highly proposed by Francia (2022) that the reading materials must be interactive, supportive of independent learning and simple in nature for them to become appealing to the learners. Hence, motivated learners learn better.

Moreover, the Reading Enhancement and Assessment Plan (REAP) has been proposed by Sor & Caraig (2021) to monitor and enhance the reading level of the learners and to develop intervention programs that will cater to their needs. Furthermore, to enhance the learners' reading comprehension skills, it is suggested to continually provide word recognition, oral reading, silent reading, and listening comprehension activities.

Lastly to add, a study on intensive reading interventions on English learners with learning disabilities in the United States suggests that it is necessary to have strengthened intensive reading interventions in addition to school-wide programs to enhance reading outcomes, for the reason that even after intervention, the learners demonstrate low- and below-average reading performance (Williams & Vaughn, 2019). With regard to the RE activity on Catch-up Fridays, intensive reading should be employed too.

While the pieces of local and international literature discussed above propose specific strategies and present robust rationale for reading enhancement, there is a scant availability of studies focusing on the perceptions and experiences of the learners on such programs and activities. Thus, the findings of this study shall add insights and serve as a bridge over the identified gaps to help policy- and decision-makers design and implement mechanisms for the benefits of the learners in general.

3. Methodology

To gain a rich and in-depth understanding of how the learners perceive the implementation of Reading Enhancement, a focus group with semi-structured interviews was conducted on the Grade 11 learners from the two RE groups during the Catch-up Fridays at the Jose Lim Ho National High School. The focus group participants were selected

randomly and based on availability. The sample consisted of nine males and twelve females. Even though the sample composition had varied academic achievement statuses and varied learning strands, these learners were all identified as average to advanced readers.

The Grade 11 learners in the school were divided into three groups, one for the RI and two for the RE. Those learners identified as having challenges and assessed below average in reading were sent to the RI group, while those who were identified as average and above average readers were sent to the two RE groups. For the RE groups, the learners were sorted alphabetically based on their surnames. The first half went to the first group and the second half went to the other. This means that learners from various learning strands were grouped together regardless of sex and academic status.

The participants to be studied were specifically asked how they felt about the Catch-up Fridays, particularly for the RE activities. Also, they were asked to say anything whether good or bad, about what they liked or disliked, and asked to explain the reasons behind their responses. Also, additionally, they were asked what their expectations of and suggestions for the weekly program.

The responses were manually recorded, coded, and then analyzed for themes.

3.1. Scope and Limitation

The study focused only on the RE program, thus, RI and other components of the Catch-up Fridays were not covered. Additionally, the participants were only Grade 11 in the RE program and did not include Grade 11 in RI and so as the other grade levels. Additionally, further, the study was conducted exclusively in the school, which means, no community learning center, private and other schools were involved.

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted by the researchers who were teachers at the school, thus, some bias from both the interviewer's and the participants' side might have arisen and had been overlooked. Furthermore, still, the study was conducted only after two months from the actual implementation of the Catch-up Fridays in the school.

3.2. Ethical Consideration

Consent and permissions from the school administrators, teaching staff, and learners were secured before commencing the formal data gathering. Also, the participants were orally asked or interviewed first before they had been informed that the data they would provide would be used in a formal research. This had been done to minimize biases or avoid, specifically, observer-expectancy and Hawthorne effects (Tenny et al., 2022). Afterward, the responses were transcribed and shown to the participating individuals for affirmation and it was stated in the assent that they could withdraw or opt not to include their responses for the study and that there would be no effect or any impact on their academic grades or any scholastic aspect whatever action they would take regarding this very study. Lastly, there was no personal identifying information of the individual participant was kept and used in the study.

4. Results and Discussion

The main purpose of this study has been to gain insights about the Reading Enhancement program in the Catch-up Fridays from the learners' perspective. After prudent research undertaking about the topic, the researchers had gathered the following findings which are presented herein. Then it was found out that the learners have varied takes on the RE program, some exclaimed their positive perceptions while some expressed their negative takes. Hence, responses from the interviews included general and specific aspects of the program.

When the learners were asked how they felt about RE in general, they mostly claimed that they were enjoying the activities. The learners claimed that they were excited since they were grouped with the other learners from different learning strands, consequently, new faces and a different class setting for them.

The various, new approaches for conducting classes were applauded by the learners, too. RE classes were tackled differently compared to the traditional classroom setting. Various strategies were implemented by the teachers in RE classes, which are: Drop Everything and Read, Teacher Read-Aloud, Book Talk, Choral Reading, Partner Reading, and Red-a-thon, combined with assorted activities for motivation and interactivity, such as games and role-plays, preventing monotony in the class.

However, some learners expressed their disapproval, too. They declared that they would rather have regular classes over RE. Some claimed that Catch-up Fridays defeats its own purpose, which is to improve learning gains and recover learning losses, since regular classes are condensed to four days in week. Some even reasoned out that they disliked the group activities since their groupmates were no longer the faces that they used to work and learn with. Some even argued that reading should not be shoved on everyone since not everyone likes reading, they even proposed to have various leisurely activities for the learners to choose from such as dancing, singing, poetry, drama, art, cooking and others.

Moreover, two teacher groups, namely, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) and the Teachers' Dignity Coalition (TDC), reported that the learners are disengaged in the Catch-up Fridays activities hence they skip school on Fridays (Chi, 2024).

Overall, when the learners were asked whether they like or dislike having the RE program each Friday, in general, through the rest of the school year, most of them showed their thumbs-downs. This is somehow consistent with report of the Asian Affairs (2024) on January 12th that learners were critical of the Catch-up Fridays claiming that this exacerbates workload and stress, as the learners feel pressured to make up for missed subjects during the week, leading to diminished free time and flexibility, particularly amidst the pandemic, and express boredom and frustration due to the perceived repetitiveness and dullness of the program.

However, when the learners were asked about their expectations, they were positive that the programs on Catch-up Fridays would be beneficial to them after all. Though the learners expressed their boredom and dislike for the program, they were hopeful that the activities would change and that their proposed leisurely activities like dancing, singing, poetry, drama, art, cooking and the like would be incorporated in the program.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the great intentions of the Catch-up Fridays program of DepEd, which are to strengthen the learners' learning in the disciplines, particularly in reading, values, and health, there has been a dichotomy of perceptions from the learners, teachers, and some concerned groups. Some learners take the program positively while some do not and some have high expectations while some have next to nothing new.

In light of the results obtained from this study, since DepEd is firm on its decision to instill the Catch-up Fridays and its components (Sevillano, 2024) and since Implementation of Catch-up Fridays is a binding nationwide memorandum (DepEd Memorandum No. 001, s. 2024), it is thus recommended that teachers must continue on implementing the program while devising strategies to make the activities more engaging and interesting for the learners.

The Reading Enhancement component of the Catch-up Fridays must be integrated with leisurely activities which the learners highly demand. Therefore, the teachers are advised to innovate and strategize beyond the recommendations of the DepEd order and memorandum by incorporating, for instance, a karaoke time which allows readers to enhance reading by singing out the lyrics, or a movie time to enhance the learners' ability to find context clues for difficult words by looking at the motion pictures and events in the movies, or perhaps, a cooking time which allows learners to read recipes and distinguish difficult words used in culinary arts.

The school heads, administrators, and head teachers are also recommended to conduct training and seminars for the teachers and devise strategies and mechanisms to improve the delivery of the activities of all the components of the Catch-up Fridays.

Conclusively, all stakeholders of the basic education in the whole nation must work together for the welfare and benefits of all the learners.

5.1. For Future Researches

Further studies are highly proposed to expand the understanding on the learners' perception of the Catch-up Fridays implemented by the Department of Education of the Republic of the Philippines, especially in the Reading Enhancement. It is recommended to expand the study beyond the delimited Grade 11 and include the Reading Intervention groups and so as the geographical context.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare no conflict of interest regarding the conduct of this study and the publication of this research paper.

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Research Classes in an Environment Lacking Internet Access

Andrea Peyne B. Elicano, Ryann B. LaBad, Jean B. Alindo & Jeanin Lucañas
Jose Lim Ho National High School, Ozamiz City, Philippines

Abstract

The main goal of this research is to gain insights on the impact of the lack of internet access on the high school learners and the teachers especially in the Investigation, Inquiries, and Immersion; Practical Research 1 and 2; and similar learning areas prescribed by the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Republic of the Philippines for the K to 12 Basic Education curriculum. To determine the impact of the lack of internet access to the learners' productivity, ease of learning, learning confidence, learning satisfaction and the teachers' ease of teaching and perceive learner's performance, a survey was conducted on the Grade 10 and Grade 11 learners at the Jose Lim Ho National High School during the 3rd and 4th quarter of the School Year 2024-2025. Learners demonstrated moderate adaptability, completing tasks within one to five hours, though their self-reported productivity often contrasted with teachers' estimates. A neutral stance on ease of learning, moderate confidence levels, and neutral to slightly positive satisfaction suggest resilience but underscore the need for improved resource accessibility and structured support to enhance engagement. From the teachers' perspective, the lack of internet access complicated the teaching process and diminished the perceived quality of outputs, aligning with prior research on the importance of digital tools in fostering deeper engagement and productivity. The findings emphasize the need for interventions that bridge the gap between learners' perceptions and teachers' expectations, while addressing resource limitations to improve both teaching and learning outcomes in resource-constrained settings.

Keywords: research classes, lack of internet access, high school research, research class without internet

For correspondence regarding this article: ‡

‡RYANN B. LABAD
Teacher II
Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades
Maningcol, Ozamiz City, Philippines 7200
+63 908 992 2797 | (088) 531-4084
ryann.labad@deped.gov.ph

1. Introduction

The internet is a revolutionary technology that is, literally, a life-changer and has impact on both on our daily life aspects and professional affairs. Its widespread application in education, for research purposes, information-gathering and knowledge-boosting is a clear indication of the significance of the internet in the field of education. Nowadays, Google is the most favored place to turn to when querying, solving a problem, or dispelling our doubts. This shows that the internet is no longer optional thus essential in education, according to Sharna (2019) in her paper.

The main goal of this research is to gain insights on the impact of the lack of internet access on the high school learners and the teachers in Jose Lim Ho National High School (JLHNHS) in Barangay Calabayan of Ozamiz City, especially in the Investigation, Inquiries, and Immersion; Practical Research 1 and 2; and similar learning areas prescribed by the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Republic of the Philippines for the K to 12 Basic Education curriculum (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013; Official Gazette, 2013).

In accordance with the research conducted by Amponsah and colleagues (2022), academic standards in the learners are significantly impacted by internet access, with those possessing such access demonstrating greater academic improvement compared to their counterparts without it. It is recommended that educational administrators collaborate with relevant stakeholders to facilitate the provision of internet facilities, backed by effective management support. Moreover, School ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Laboratories should be adequately equipped with internet resources, and the learners should receive instruction on utilizing search engines for online academic research. The availability of internet facilities within educational institutions plays a pivotal role in augmenting academic performance.

The significance of the internet in education for the learners lies in its facilitation of research and the reinforcement of school-taught content. Individuals utilize the internet based on their specific needs and interests, enhancing the accessibility and applicability of educational resources (Sharna, 2019).

Miller (2023) outlines key educational transformations facilitated by the internet. Firstly, the internet provides unparalleled access to knowledge, allowing the learners to explore diverse subjects beyond traditional curricula through scholarly papers, eBooks, and online courses.

Secondly, the internet fosters collaborative learning by enabling seamless communication and real-time collaboration through various digital tools and platforms. This approach enhances critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills while creating an engaging learning environment.

Thirdly, the internet promotes personalized learning by utilizing data analytics and adaptive technologies to tailor educational experiences based on individual learning styles, skills, and preferences. This adaptability allows the learners to learn independently and delve deeper into areas of interest.

Fourthly, the internet enhances research capabilities by providing easy access to massive databases, digital libraries, and academic publications, facilitating efficient data collection and interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers.

Lastly, the internet contributes to a global perspective and cultural exchange in education. It enables communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among academic institutions and the learners worldwide, fostering cultural awareness, tolerance, and preparing the learners to be global citizens in an interconnected world.

Overall, the internet has significantly transformed education by expanding access to information, promoting collaborative and personalized learning, enhancing research capabilities, and fostering a globalized educational environment.

Furthermore, a research study by Carcillar in 2017 at the Datu B. Balunto National High School that aimed to address three key questions related to the relationship between internet use as an educational communication tool and cognitive gain among Grade 9 indigenous learners has the insightful findings. Firstly, the results indicated a positive relationship, showing that the learners who were provided with mobile devices and internet access during class discussions exhibited better post-test scores compared to those without such access. The findings supported the idea that the internet, when used as an educational communication tool, contributed to cognitive improvement among indigenous learners.

Secondly, the study explored how indigenous learners utilized the internet for learning purposes. During the intervention, the learners effectively employed internet search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo! to access various web pages, enhancing their ability to research facts and information in real-time during class. The use of mobile devices was identified as particularly impactful, allowing the learners to actively participate in the learning process, make choices, and process information independently.

Lastly, the research examined the response of indigenous learners to the use of the internet as an educational communication tool. The findings revealed that the learners with internet access demonstrated better post-test scores, improved interaction, collaboration, and performance in the classroom. Despite preconceptions about indigenous populations lagging behind in technology adoption, the study found that many learners were tech-savvy and engaged with contemporary trends, such as Korean pop and social media (Carcillar, 2017).

As highlighted by these various studies from abroad and within the country, internet access for learners in the classroom is indubitably essential, especially in the teaching-learning process of research.

In JLHNHS, there is a gaping lack in the learners' access to the internet. Albeit the school has a considerably decent internet connection, access is restricted only to the Computer Room and the Multi-purpose Hall. While the Computer Room is intended to be part of the Digital Learning and Research Center (DLRC) for the learners, access to the facility is limited since this is utilized as a classroom for Empowerment Technologies, Media Information and Literacy, and other classes due to the lack of classrooms. On the other hand, speaking of the Multi-Purpose Hall, internet access is only limited to the teachers due to the connectivity and bandwidth limit.

Consequent to the limitations of the internet access, learners tend to experience difficulty on the transfer of knowledge; academic stress for spending holidays, weekends and free time on doing research at home or at public shops instead of during the research class in the classroom; and activity lag since there is no immediate access to any information related to the research topics.

Meanwhile, the internet access problem also affects the teachers. As reported in the preliminary interviews and personal correspondences, teachers explained that it is difficult to visualize or demonstrate the use of digital technology in teaching research. While research and digital-literacy are considered as essential 21st century skills, it is mostly effective teaching these competencies through modelling and demonstrating rather, instead of merely having lectures and conceptual teaching.

2. Methodology

Jose Lim Ho National High School is a large, rural, secondary school situated in Barangay Calabayan, Ozamiz City, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. As described by PhilAtlas, Calabayan, a barangay located in Ozamiz City within the province of Misamis Occidental, is having a population of 4,275 according to the 2020 Census (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). This accounted for 3.05% of Ozamiz City's total population.

The Grade 10 learners who were enrolled in English 10 Research and Grade 11 learners who were enrolled in Practical Research 1 participated in the study. There was a total of 150 responses for the survey and questionnaire designed by the researchers specifically for this study.

The survey was conducted optionally online or physical and the participants were instructed to select which modality they prefer to respond to. The study was conducted during the 3rd and 4th quarter in the 2nd semester during the school year 2024-2025.

The research teachers were also surveyed and interviewed to determine their perspective regarding the issue.

The resulting data were analyzed through percentage and ratings to determine the gravity of the impact of the lack of internet access to the learners' productivity, ease of learning, learning confidence, and learning satisfaction in the perspective of the learners themselves, so as of the teachers.

3. Results

3.1. Learners' Perspective

The learners were surveyed online and/or physically to determine their productivity, ease of learning, learning confidence, and learning satisfaction on three various research phase activities, namely, background of the study, review of related literature, and research methodology.

3.1.1. Productivity Without Internet

The productivity of the learners is measured through determining the time they can complete a specific activity. Figures 1a, 1b, and 1c present the distribution of the percentage

of learners on how much time they can complete the background of the study, review of related literature, and methodology sections respectively.

Figure 1a

Time to Complete the Background of the Study as Reported by Learners without Internet in the Classroom

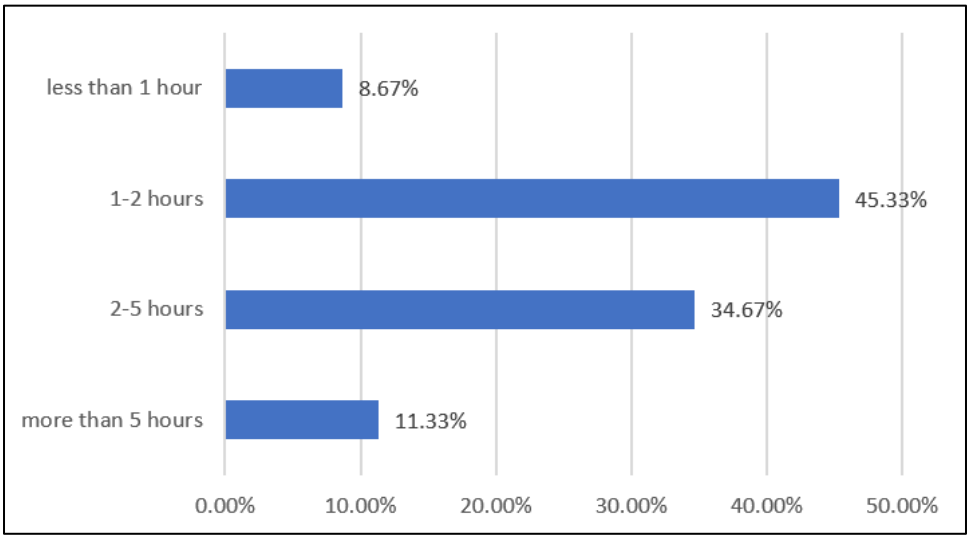


Figure 1b

Time to Complete the Review of Related Literature as Reported by Learners without Internet in the Classroom

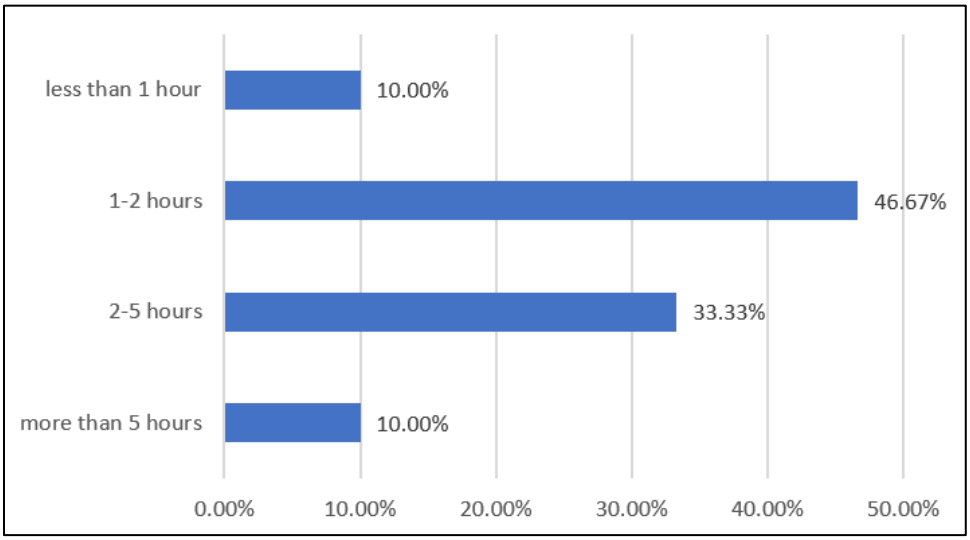


Figure 1c

Time to Complete the Research Methodology as Reported by Learners without Internet in the Classroom

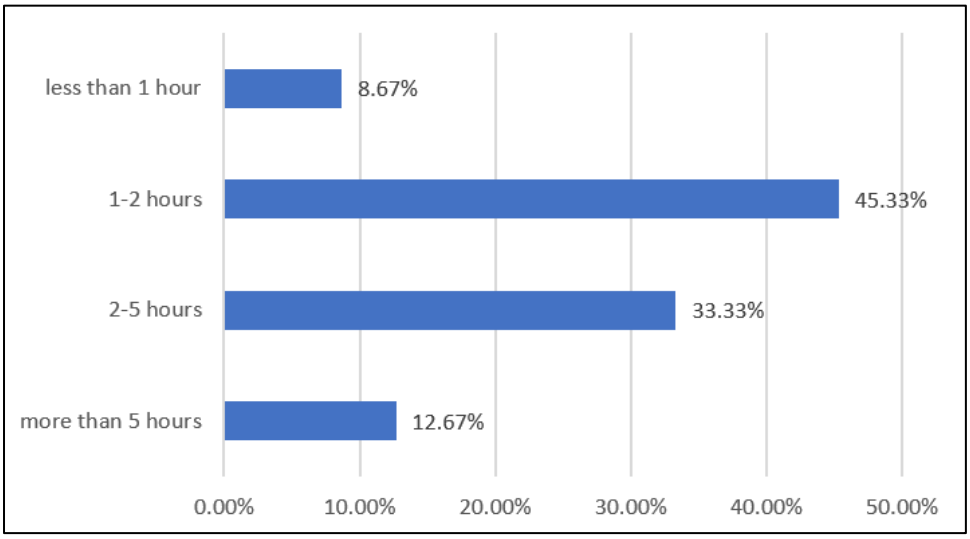


Figure 1a indicates that most of the learners (45.33%) claimed that they can complete the background of the study within one to two hours, the 34.67 percent can complete it in two to five hours. Additionally, 11.33 percent in more than five hours and 8.67 percent in less than an hour.

In Figure 1b, most of the learners (46.67%) reported that they can finish the review of related literature within one to two hours. A 33.33 percent reported to finish within two to five hours, while the rest equally claimed that they can finish the same activity in less than an hour (10%) and in more than five hours (10%).

A 45.33 percent of the learners reported that they can complete the research methodology in an hour or two, followed by 33.33 percent within two to five hours, then 12.67 percent in more than five hours, and 8.67 percent in less than an hour, as indicated in Figure 1c.

3.1.2. Ease of Learning Without Internet

The participating learners were also asked about how do they perceive their ease of learning about the background of the study, review of related literature and research methodology. The results are presented in Figures 2a, 2b, and 2c.

Figure 2a

Ease of Learning the Background of the Study without Internet in the Classroom

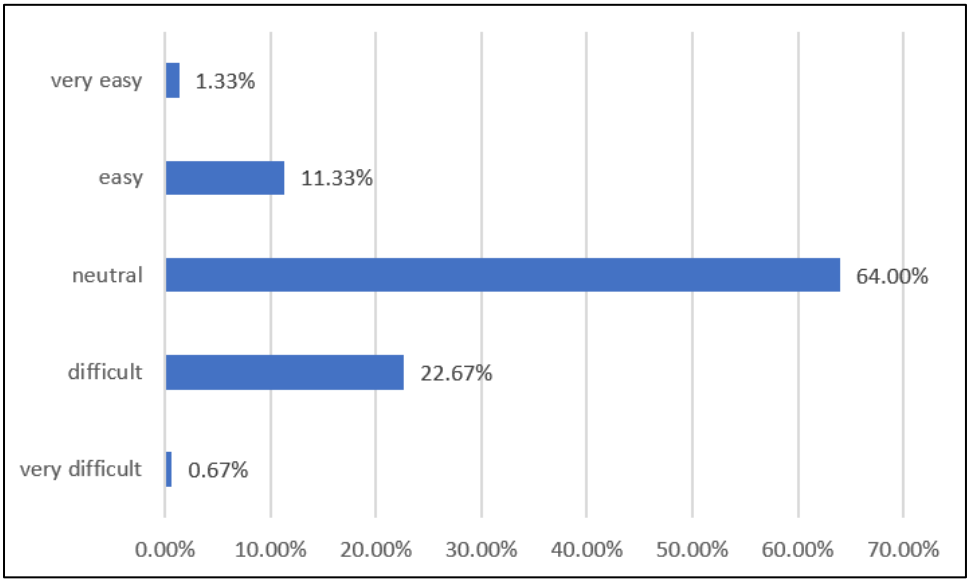


Figure 2b

Ease of Learning the Review of Related Literature without Internet in the Classroom

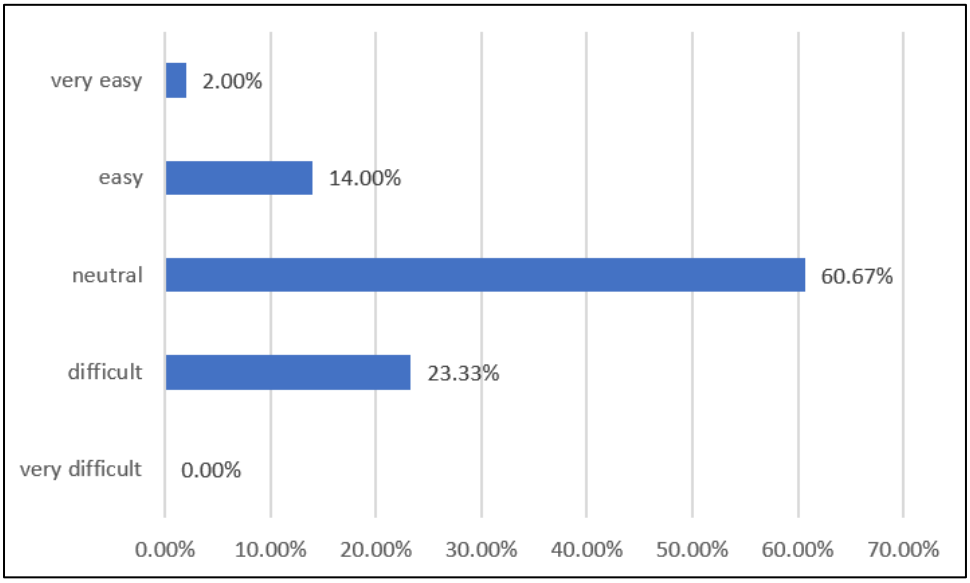
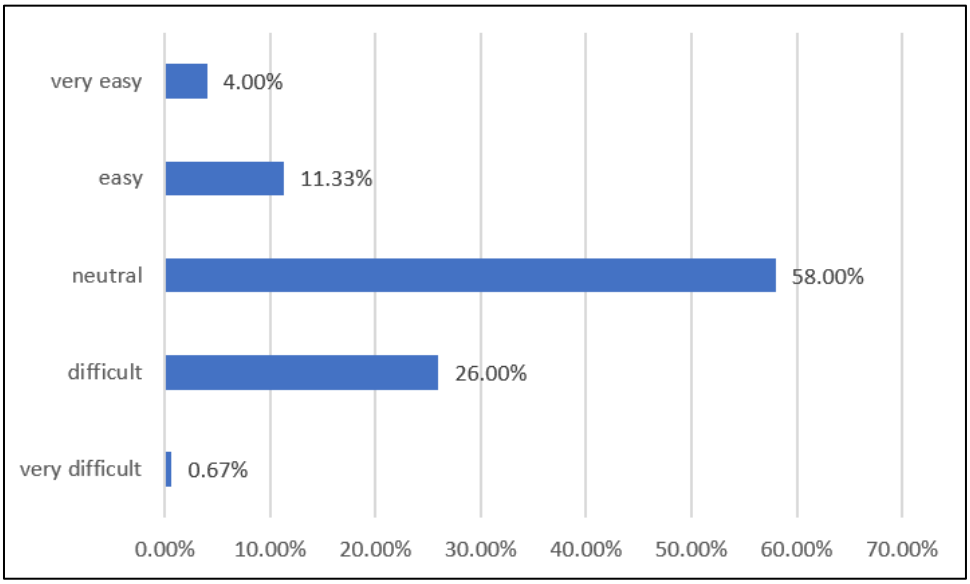


Figure 2c

Ease of Learning the Research Methodology without Internet in the Classroom



Most of the learners, about and over 60 percent, perceived their learning as neither easy nor difficult (neutral) in the various research phase activities, namely, background of the study, review of related literature, and research methodology. Only below 30 percent found their learning in similar activities to be difficult. Only around 11 to 14 percent found learning to be easy and only below five percent found it very easy. Additionally, a very few (less than 1%) claimed that learning was very difficult across the various research phase activities.

3.1.3. Learning Confidence Without Internet

Furthermore, the learners were also probed for their learning confidence in the same research phase activities. Figures 3a, 3b, and 3c display how confident the learners are.

Figure 3a

Confidence about Learning the Background of the Study without Internet in the Classroom

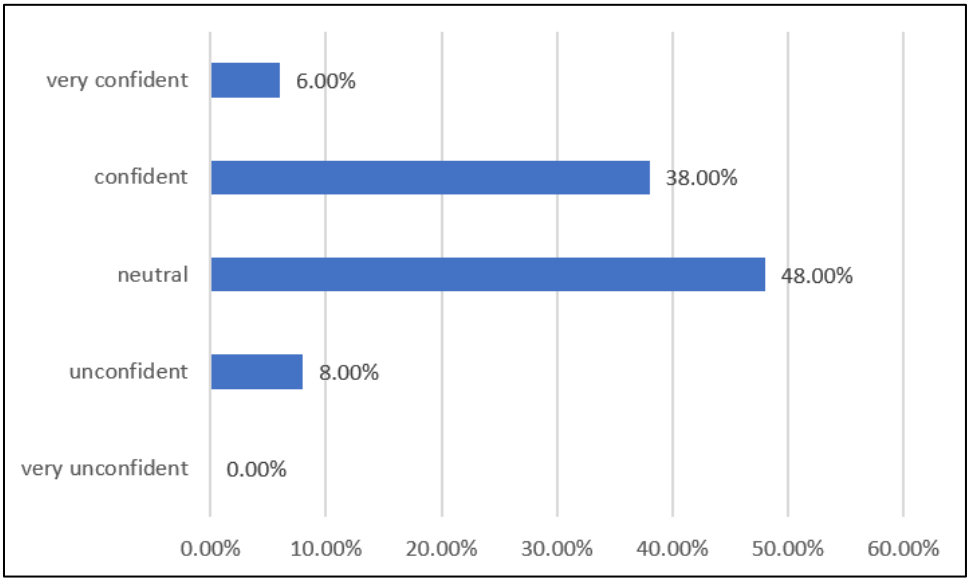


Figure 3b

Confidence about Learning the Review of Related Literature without Internet in the Classroom

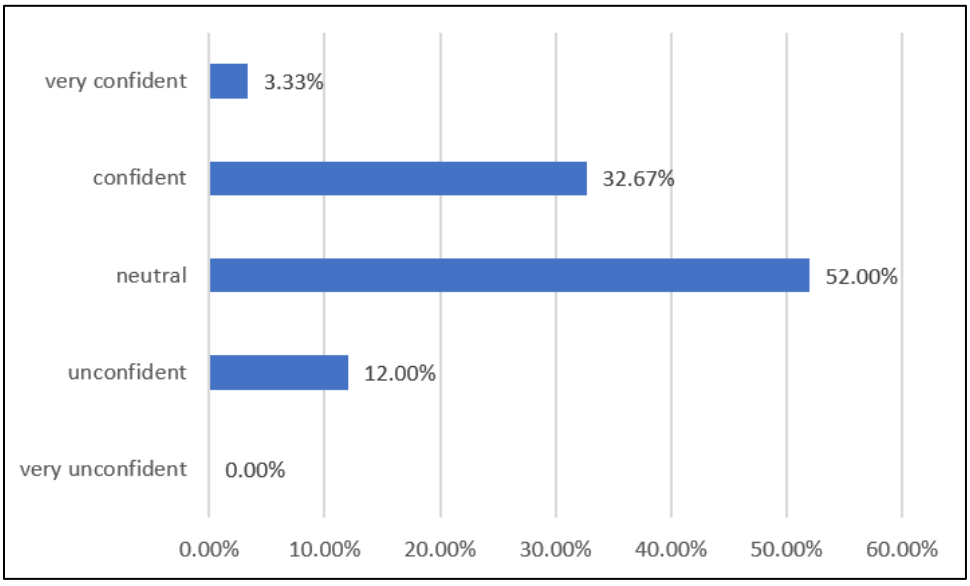
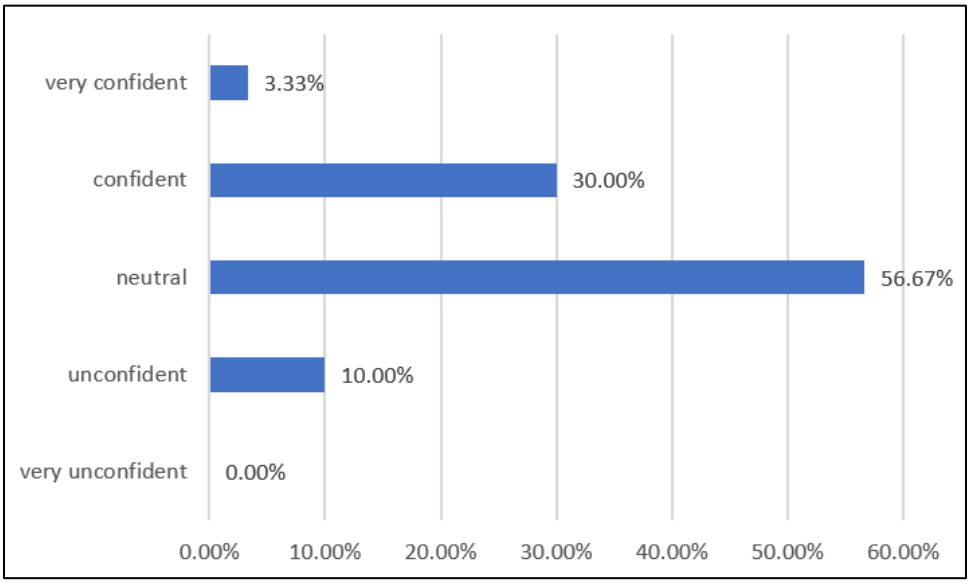


Figure 3c

Confidence about Learning the Research Methodology without Internet in the Classroom



Most of the learners (48%) were neutral about their learning confidence on the background of the study. Only 38 percent claimed that they are confidently learning in this research phase, with eight percent unconfident, six percent very confident, and zero very unconfident. See Figure 3a.

In the review of related literature and research methodology, nearly similar results have been indicated by Figures 3b and 3c. Both show that more than half of the learners reported to be neither confident nor unconfident about their learning, only around 30 percent were confident, around ten percent unconfident, and only 3.33 percent very confident, and, lastly, none very unconfident.

3.1.4. Learning Satisfaction Without Internet

Furthermore, additionally, the learners were asked to rate their satisfaction on their learning across the background of the study, review of related literature, and research methodology. The results from determining the learners' satisfaction are presented in Figures 4a, 4b, and 4c.

Figure 4a

Learning Satisfaction on the Background of the Study without Internet in the Classroom

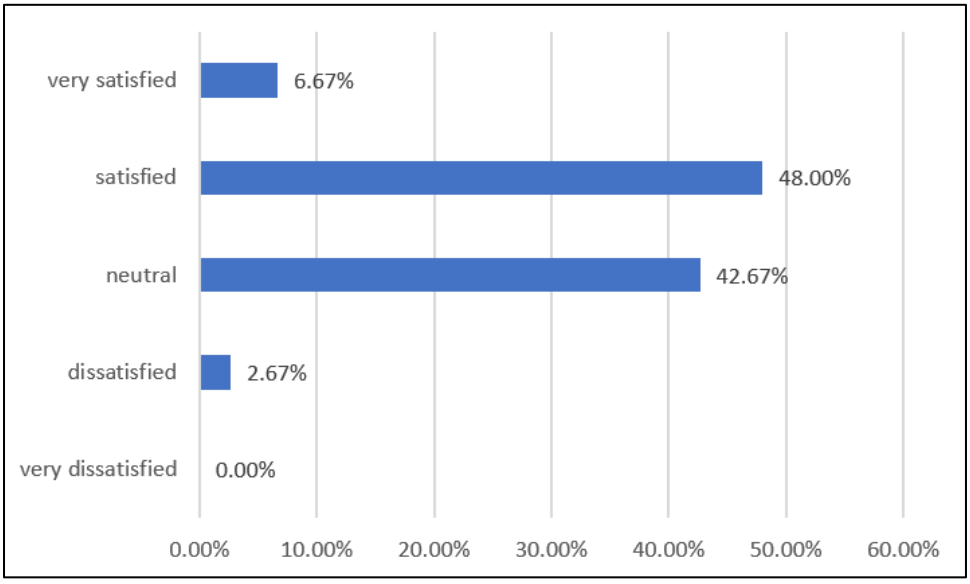


Figure 4b

Learning Satisfaction on the Review of Related Literature without Internet in the Classroom

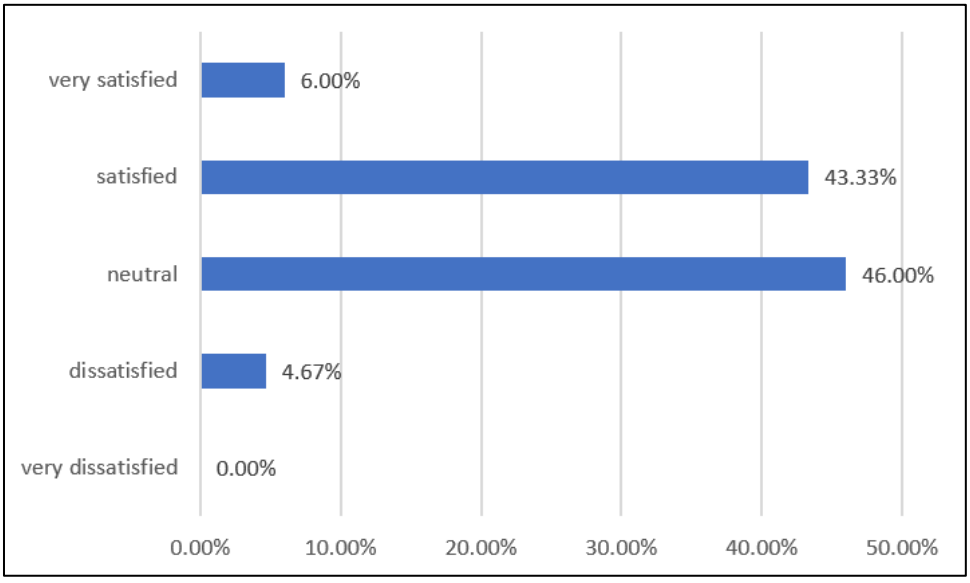
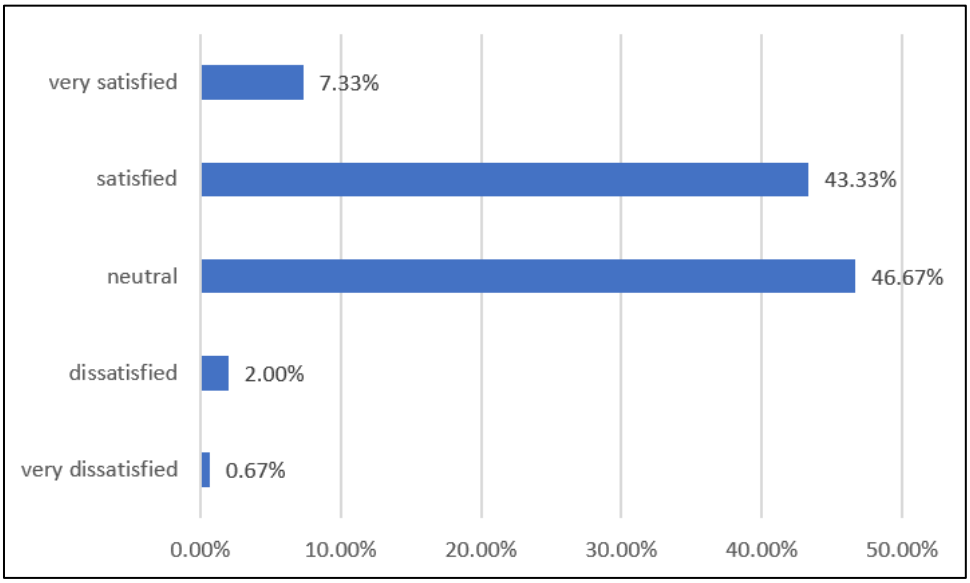


Figure 4c

Learning Satisfaction on the Research Methodology without Internet in the Classroom



Figures 4a, 4b and 4c show that around 90 percent of the learners almost equally shared satisfied and neutral responses about their satisfaction on their learning across the background of the study, review of related literature, and research methodology. Moreover, only around six to seven percent reported to be very satisfied and below five percent to be dissatisfied. However, a 0.67 percent reported to be very dissatisfied in a unique case of the research methodology—see Figure 4c.

3.2. Teachers' Perspective

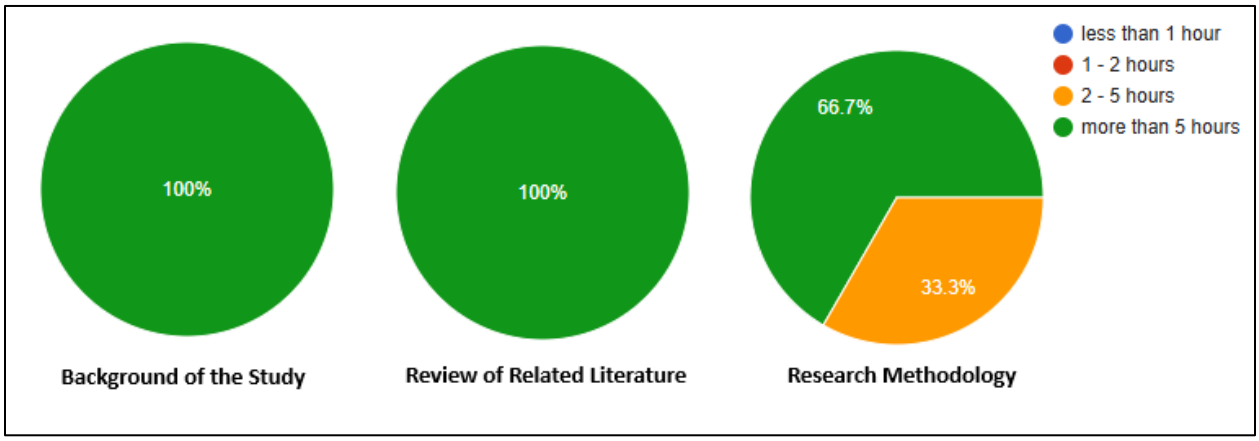
Three teachers who taught research at JLHNHS participated in this study. The teachers were asked about the learners' productivity, ease of teaching, learners' output quality, and internet access preference. The results are presented in the succeeding paragraphs.

3.2.1. Learners' Productivity Without Internet

Figure 5 shows the time to complete for the learners to complete the background of the study, review of related literature and research methodology.

Figure 5

Time for Learners to Complete Research Activities as Reported by Teachers without Internet in the Classroom



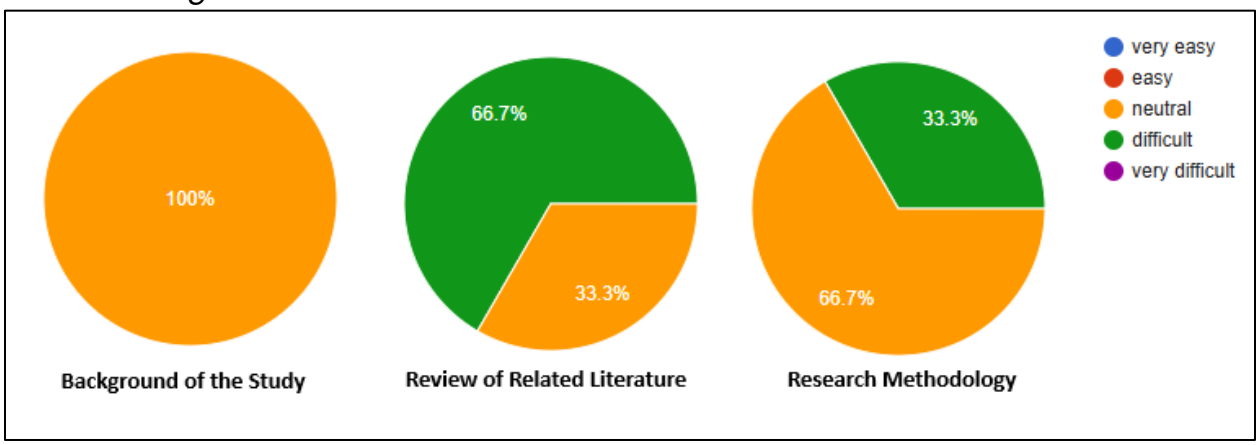
The figure indicates that 100 percent of the participating teachers agree that more than five hours will be needed for the learners to complete the background of the study. Similarly, all of them also agree that the same time is needed for the review of related literature. However, 66.7 percent of the teachers reported that it will take more than five hours to complete the research methodology and 33.3 percent reported that it will take within two to five hours.

3.2.2. Teaching Process Without Internet

The participating teachers were asked about the ease of access to teach the background of the study, review of related literature, and research methodology. Figure 6 shows how the teachers perceived the teaching process.

Figure 6

Ease of Teaching without Internet in the Classroom



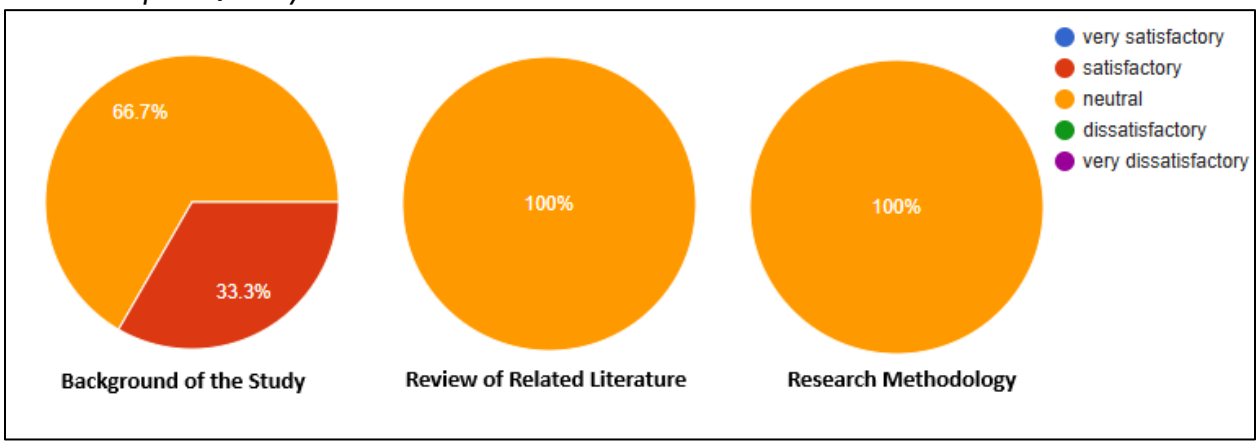
The figure indicates that 100 percent of the participating teachers agree that teaching the background of the study is fairly quite not difficult but also not easy (neutral). Additionally, 66.7 percent agree that teaching the review of related literature is quite difficult while the 33.3 percent says it is neither difficult nor easy (neutral). Moreover, in teaching the research methodology, only 33.3 percent says it is difficult and 66.7 percent is neutral.

3.2.3. Learners' Output Quality Without Internet

The participating teachers were also asked how they assessed the learners' output, Figure 7 presents their responses.

Figure 7

Learners Output Quality without Internet in the Classroom



The figure shows that 66.7 percent of the teachers rate the learners' background of the study as neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory (neutral) and only 33.3 percent rates as satisfactory. In both the review of related literature and the research methodology, all the teachers assessed the learners' output as neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory (neutral).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the challenges and perceptions of the learners and their teachers when engaging in research class activities without internet access. The results reveal a nuanced interaction between productivity, ease of learning, learning confidence, and satisfaction, as well as the teachers' evaluation of the teaching process and output quality.

4.1. Learners' Productivity, Ease of Learning, Confidence and Satisfaction

The learners' productivity data indicate that most participants could complete tasks such as the background of the study, review of related literature, and methodology within one to five hours. This suggests a moderate level of adaptability despite the lack of internet access. However, the discrepancy between learners' self-reported completion times and teachers' estimates (where all teachers believe these tasks require more than five hours) underscores a possible mismatch in perception. This aligns with studies such as Vate-U-Lan (2020), which highlight the digital divide as a factor that exacerbates productivity gaps when traditional resources replace digital ones.

The learners' neutral stance on the ease of learning across all research phases indicates a lack of strong positive or negative experiences. This neutrality could be attributed to limited access to resources, which aligns with observations by Salvucci et al. (2000) that resource availability significantly impacts learners' perceived ease of tasks. The slight increase in learners finding activities difficult points to the need for interventions that simulate or compensate for internet-based research advantages.

Learners exhibited moderate confidence, with the majority being neutral across all research phases. The lack of highly confident learners might reflect the limitations imposed by restricted access to resources, as indicated in studies by Bowers and Kumar (2015), which emphasize the role of technology in building research skills and confidence. Confidence levels could improve through strategies that provide structured guidance and alternative resources.

The learners' satisfaction responses, predominantly neutral and slightly positive, suggest a level of resilience and adaptability in performing research activities without the internet. Similar patterns were observed by Mutambik (2018), who found that learners with limited technological resources often develop alternative strategies for problem-solving, although satisfaction tends to improve when resources align with learners' expectations.

4.2. Teachers' Perspective on the Teaching Process and Output Quality

The teachers' unanimous agreement that learners require over five hours for most tasks contrasts sharply with learners' self-reported productivity. This suggests either an underestimation of task complexity by learners or a misalignment in expectations. Teachers also rated their teaching process as neutral to difficult, which corresponds with findings by Stenbom et al. (2016) that teaching effectiveness decreases without digital support tools.

Additionally, the neutral assessments of learners' output quality by most teachers indicate a perception that work produced without internet access lacks depth or

thoroughness. This supports the assertion by Kahu (2013) that educational engagement is significantly influenced by the quality and accessibility of resources.

4.2.3. Summary

The study's findings resonate with existing literature emphasizing the critical role of internet access in educational research. According to Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2014), the digital divide not only limits access to resources but also impacts the quality of outputs and engagement levels. Moreover, the moderate satisfaction and neutral confidence levels reflect a broader trend identified by Ryan and Deci (2000), which associates resource constraints with diminished intrinsic motivation in learning.

The study also highlights a significant gap in teacher-learner perceptions regarding productivity and output quality. Such gaps have been documented in research by Hattie (2009), who noted that disparities in expectations between teachers and learners can hinder effective feedback and skill development.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the challenges and perceptions of learners and teachers in conducting research activities without internet access. Learners demonstrated moderate adaptability, completing tasks within one to five hours, though their self-reported productivity often contrasted with teachers' estimates. A neutral stance on ease of learning, moderate confidence levels, and neutral to slightly positive satisfaction suggest resilience but underscore the need for improved resource accessibility and structured support to enhance engagement.

From the teachers' perspective, the lack of internet access complicated the teaching process and diminished the perceived quality of outputs, aligning with prior research on the importance of digital tools in fostering deeper engagement and productivity. The findings emphasize the need for interventions that bridge the gap between learners' perceptions and teachers' expectations, while addressing resource limitations to improve both teaching and learning outcomes in resource-constrained settings.

This study underscores the need for strategies to support learners and teachers in resource-constrained environments. Alternative offline tools, structured scaffolding, and collaborative learning could mitigate the challenges identified. Furthermore, addressing the digital divide through policy interventions remains crucial to bridging gaps in productivity, confidence, and satisfaction in educational research activities.

However, this study is limited to an unsegregated group of learners in a large, rural, public secondary school. Thus, it is further recommended for future researchers to conduct similar studies focusing on different settings. A comparative study exploring the differences between learning environments with internet to the learning environments without internet is highly encourage to supplement the data and insights revealed in this study.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers and authors of this article declare no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study so as in its publication.

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Digital Technology at Medina College Grade School vis-à-vis Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model

Ryann B. LaBad
Medina College – Ozamiz City, Philippines

Abstract

Educational systems have relied on distance learning and digital technologies to an unprecedented degree due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the government imposed a restriction on face-to-face classes, schools employed distance education to ensure continuity. This study aims to aid school administrators in making informed decisions on the use of digital technology in the coming school terms by determining the learners' performance, learners'/parents' preference, teachers' preference, teachers' digital literacy, and cost-effectiveness vis-a-vis Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model. The study was conducted at Medina College Grade School, a private non-sectarian institution of learning that offers complete elementary education from Kinder up to Grade 6, adhering to the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum of the Republic of the Philippines. The results suggest that learners perform better during the blended online-modular mode of education; learners and parents favor traditional face-to-face over distance education; teachers highly favor face-to-face mode of education; and teachers with lower levels of digital literacy will likely favor the face-to-face mode of education.

Keywords: educational technology, education 4.0, technology acceptance model, online education, distance learning

For correspondence regarding this article: §

§RYANN B. LABAD
Teacher II
Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades
Maningcol, Ozamiz City 7200 PHILIPPINES
ryannlabad@iaoeinc.org

1. Introduction

Numerous educational systems, basic education included, have relied on distance learning and digital technologies to an unprecedented degree due to the 2019 corona virus infectious disease (COVID-19) pandemic (Li et al., 2020). Since the President of the Republic of the Philippines announced in his fifth State of the Nation Address that there would be no face-to-face learning (CNN Philippines, 2020) and the Department of Education stated that schools shall provide and maximize the use of online platforms that do not require physical interactions (DepEd, 2020b), Medina College Grade School deployed the blended online-modular distance education. Consequently, electronic and digital technologies played a major role in the learning and instructional delivery.

Researches and studies on this adaptive approach are still scarce (Li, et al., 2020) and the main problem encountered with the currently employed education modality is whether the electronic or digital technology is impactful to children's learning.

However, the most indispensable technology in education is the teacher itself. Hence, a teacher has to be well-educated and knowledgeable to be able to educate others (Wikramanayake, 2005).

While the currently employed modality is in nature an adaptive approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, one factor of consideration should also be the emergence of the fourth industrial revolution also known as IR4.0 or Industry 4.0.

Industry 4.0 or the fourth industrial revolution is characterized by the advent of smart machines and the internet-of-things (Marr, 2018), where Artificial Intelligence plays a major role in the automation and digitalization of industrial and commercial processes.

Education must also evolve with the industry and the society. Hence, Education 4.0 is a response to the needs of IR4.0, where humans and technology are working together to create novel possibilities in creative and innovative ways (Lase, 2019). Thus Education 4.0 may refer to the use of alternative teaching and learning approaches and/or modalities in education optimized by the use of digital technologies.

Classrooms, in the next five to seven years, will not be limited to the traditional, physical environment. These changes will not be limited to classroom layout but also the mode of delivery (Dunwill, 2016). As of today, there is the advent of massive open online courses also known as MOOCs (see Mora, 2013; Sanchez-Gordon & Luján-Mora, 2014) and virtual classrooms (see Techopedia, 2020) which are not seen in traditional education, but these could evolve in no time with the application of virtual and augmented reality, machine learning, quantum computing, and other developing digital technologies.

However, in the application of digital technologies in education, various factors must be considered. In this study, the underlying principles of the Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model (see Davis, 1989) are treated substantially.

The main purpose of this study is to aid school administrators in making informed decisions on the use of digital technology in the coming school terms, hence, the following variables are highly considered: learners' performance; teachers', learners', and parents'

preferences; digital literacy or ICT skills; and cost-effectiveness, while grounded on the concepts of Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model.

Furthermore, this paper aims to provide a thorough discussion on the application of digital technology in basic education to help school administrators decide whether to reduce, retain, or reinforce the use of such technology in the upcoming school terms.

2. Literature Review

COVID-19 has had the most challenging impact on the sector of education all around the world (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020) and forced schools to operate in alternative modes of instructional delivery other than the traditional face-to-face setting. Distance education became the optimum solution to counter the health and safety concerns of the students, teachers, and other stakeholders. The government of the Republic of the Philippines declared that there will be no face-to-face learning at schools (CNN Philippines, 2020) and the Department of Education (2020), as the agency mandated to ensure access to, promote equity in, and improve the quality of basic education, ordered that schools shall provide and maximize the use of online platforms. Consequently, digital technologies played a vital role during these trying times in the education sector. With this rapid shift to digital technologies in education, the researcher considered grounding this study on Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model.

Education 4.0 guarantees that teaching-learning processes will take advantage of the boundless opportunities offered by innovative technology. A study (Alda et al., 2020) recommends that school administrators and faculty members believed that they are prepared enough in terms of their abilities in selecting, curating and integrating digital assets for teaching and learning as they are moreover given capacity-buildings through workshops and seminars related to digital proficiency. Whereas, Montealegre (2019) claimed that the new generation of learners are not just tech-savvy but also technology-dependent. It is, thus, suggested that digital technologies undeniably prove to play an essential role in the delivery of the current and future education system.

Lai (2017) explained in a study that the objective of Davis' (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is to clarify the common determinants of computer acceptance that lead to clarifying users' conduct over a wide extent of end-user computing technologies and user populations. The first TAM model included and tried two particular assumptions: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU). Perceived Usefulness is characterized as the potential user's subjective inclination that the utilization of a certain system will advance productivity and Perceived Ease of Use refers to the degree to which the potential user expects the target system to be easy (Davis, 1989). The perception of the user towards a system may be impacted by other elements referred to as external variables in TAM. Venkatesh and Bala (2008) devised the TAM3 utilizing the four distinctive types considering the individual differences, system characteristics, social influence, and facilitating conditions which are determinants of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In TAM3 (third version of TAM), the perceived ease of use to perceived usefulness,

computer anxiety to perceived ease of use and perceived ease of use to behavioral intention were controlled by experiences.

The understanding of the TAM will aid in the understanding of the perceived digital literacy of teachers and their preferences in the instructional delivery mode for this study. Thus, insights behind the choices of the teachers in utilizing digital technologies in teaching may be impacted by their experiences in the use of technology as well as in their preparatory training activities.

Both the concepts of Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model shall be utilized as instruments to further understand the factors that influence the teachers preferred usage of digital technologies in teaching and delivering instructions to the learners in distance and online education.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted at Medina College Grade School, a private non-sectarian institution of learning that offers complete elementary education from Kinder up to Grade 6, adhering to the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum of the Republic of the Philippines (Official Gazette, n.d.). Situated at National Highway, Barangay Maningcol, Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental. Maningcol is a suburban barangay that is partly coastal, partly industrial, and mostly agricultural (rice and coconut). Ozamiz City has a population of 6,951 as determined by the Census of Population (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). Ozamiz, sometimes spelled Ozamis, is a third-class city in the province of Misamis Occidental with annual regular revenue of 654,453,854.29 Philippine Pesos as of the fiscal year 2016 (Bureau of Local Government Finance, n.d.).

3.1. Research Model/Design

While the primary objective of this study was to determine the learners' performance; teachers', learners', parents' preferences; teachers' digital literacy; and cost-effectiveness grounded on the concepts of Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model, this also aimed to provide insights for the school administrators to decide on whether to reduce, retain, or reinforce the digital technologies installed in the school for the teaching-learning utility. Hence, the researchers opted to employ a correlational retrospective study (Lau, 2017; Von Elm et al., 2014) to compare the learners' performances and preferences in the current school year to the previous. Additionally, the teachers' preference would be correlated with digital literacy. Additionally, further, essence from the Education 4.0 and Technology Acceptance Model concepts would be discussed in depth to serve as a solid foundation for the administrators' decision on the reduction, retainment, and reinforcement of the current technology in the school.

3.2. Data Collecting Tools

Researcher-designed survey questionnaires and interview sheets were utilized with the scholastic documents of the learners, particularly, Learner's Progress Report Card (SF9), Learner's Permanent Record (SF10), Learner Enrollment and Survey Form (DepEd, 2020a), and Student Flexible Learning Survey (Guidance Center, 2020).

3.3. Sampling or Study Group

The main population were the learners in Medina College Grade School from Kinder to Grade 6 levels during the school year 2020-2021. The next set of population involved the teachers in the Grade School department who are all licensed professional teachers (Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act, 1994) aging mid-20s to late 30s with 2 to 4 years of work experience. And lastly, the parents of all the involved learners.

The sample from the learners' population were obtained through availability, which means, only the learners who fulfilled the Learner Enrollment and Survey Form and the Student Flexible Learning Survey and who had had completed the previous school year in the school were included. The teachers, however, were everyone in the population. Finally, the parents' sample were obtained through availability through online surveys and interviews.

3.4. Data Analysis

As a retrospective study, the learners' performance in the current school year was compared to the previous to determine whether or not there could be a significance difference (Lau, 2017). As a correlational study, the researcher assumed that the observations were independent to one another and linear (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2016), thus, a correlation analysis was integrated to determine whether the current learners' performance was influenced by the learners' preference and whether the teachers' preference correlate with the level of digital literacy.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the research instruments used in the study were evaluated and approved by the research experts and authority of the Medina College Research Committee. Research ethics were upheld with the utmost consideration. The tools, including the assent and the informed consent, passed the meticulous checkpoints of the school's ethical research board.

3.6. Research Procedures

The researcher gathered the SF9 and SF10 of the learners from school year 2020-2021 and 2019-2020 and compared them to determine significant changes. The compiled Learner Enrollment and Survey Form and the Flexible Learning Survey were also examined to determine the learners' preferred mode of learning. The parents were sent survey questionnaires and interview forms through online communication to gather utilizable data from their population. And lastly, the teachers were given survey forms to determine their preferred mode of instruction and their self-rated level of digital literacy. Ultimately, the researcher conducted data analyses to arrive at a conclusion and open a discussion in relation to the research topic which is to determine the utility of digital technology in Medina College Grade School for the administrators to decide whether to reduce, retain, or reinforce the current technology employed in the school.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Learners' Performance

Through ocular evaluation of the learner's grades and academic distinction (Policy Guidelines on Awards and Recognition for the K to 12 Basic Education Program, 2016), by comparing their grades on the same learning areas from their previous year level to the present school year (2020-2021), the data showed a dramatic increase of an average of 4.8 points. While their General Weighted Average (GWA) had shown 3.2 points rise on average.

Moreover, there were also significant changes on the honor's list. Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of honor students to the total population. The percentage of non-honors dramatically decreased in the latest school year by 22.46% difference to the previous.

Figure 1

Learners' Percentage of Honors during School Year 2019-2020

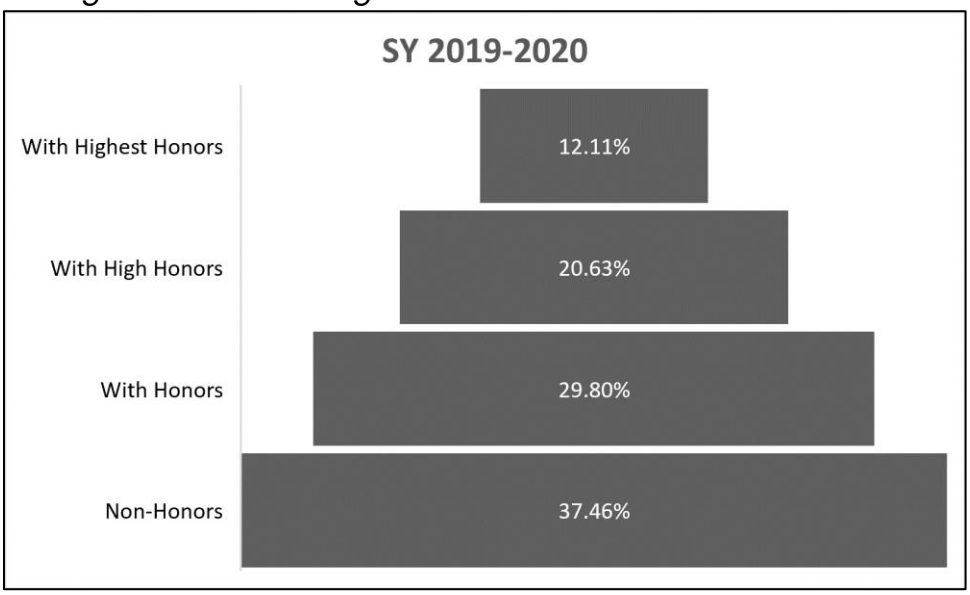
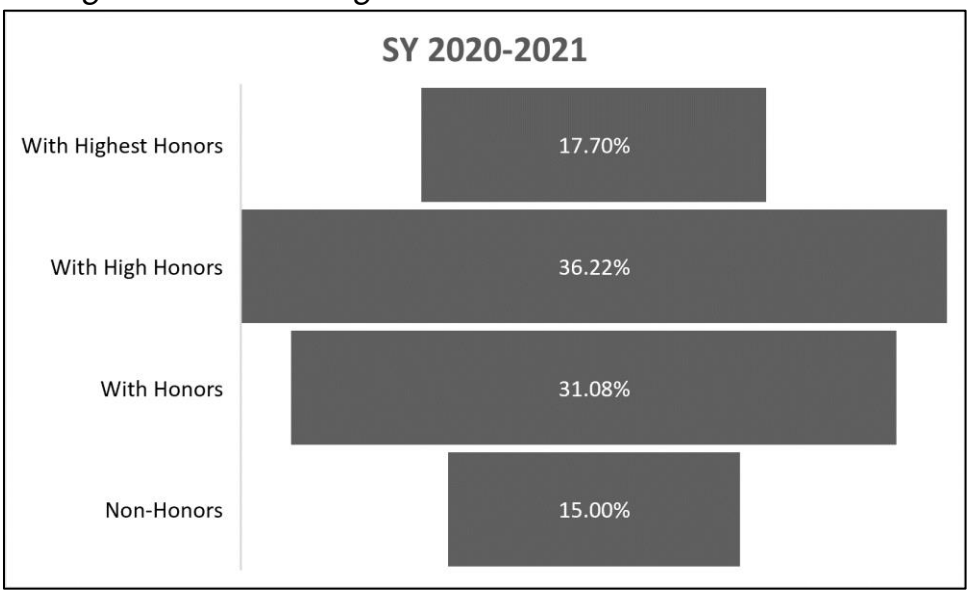


Figure 2

Learners' Percentage of Honors during School Year 2020-2021



Figures 1 and 2 show a significant contrast of the percentages of honors in school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. The learners who received an academic distinction as "With Highest Honors" rose to 17.70% in SY2020-2021 from 12.11% in SY2019-2020, "With High Honors" to 36.22% from 20.63%, "With Honors" to 31.08% from 29.80%, while the non-honors fell to 15% from 37.46%.

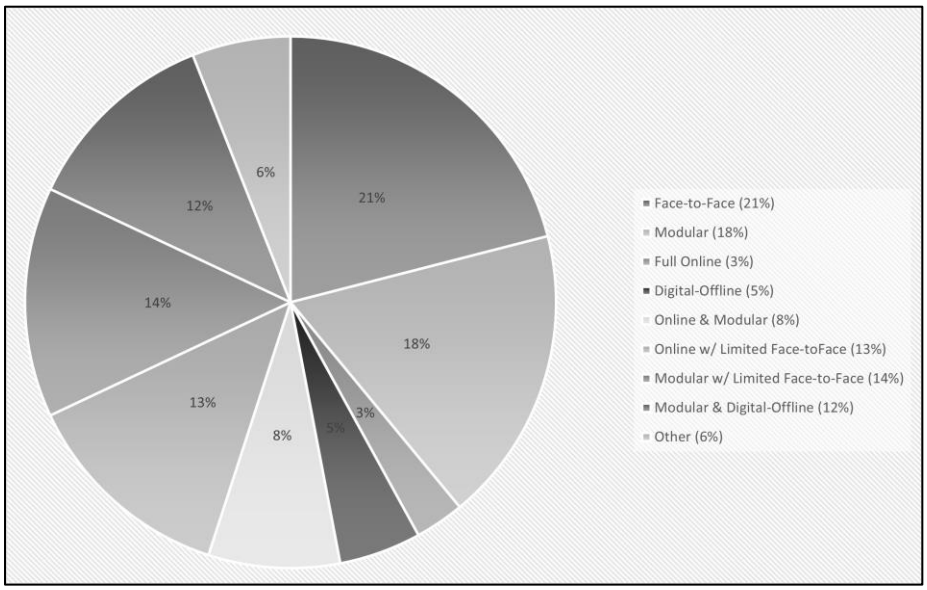
4.2. Learners'/Parents' Preference

Due to the researcher's assumption that parents decide for their children and that the decision on the mode of instructional delivery is a consensus between the parent and the child, it was decided that the data from the learner's enrollment form and the survey questionnaire given to the parents would be used to determine the learner's and parents' both preferences as unanimous.

Parents and learners mostly preferred face-to-face (21%) mode of delivery for educational instructions, followed by the purely modular (18%), and modular with limited face-to-face (14%) as the third preference. Figure 3 shows a comparative illustration of the instructional mode preferences.

Figure 3

Parents' and Learners' Preference in Instructional Mode

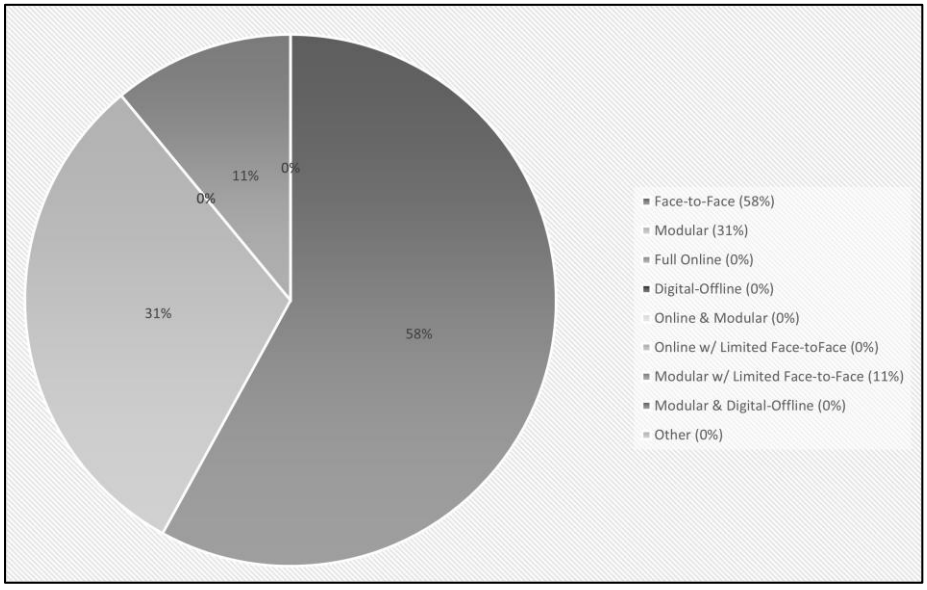


4.3. Teachers' Preference

Face-to-face instruction is also favored by the teachers with 58 percentage of the population. However, there were only three modes selected by the participants. With the earlier mentioned face-to-face (58%), followed by modular (31%), and modular with limited face-to-face (11%), all other modes were not selected and scored zero percentage of the population. This data is illustrated by Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

Teachers' Preference in Instructional Mode

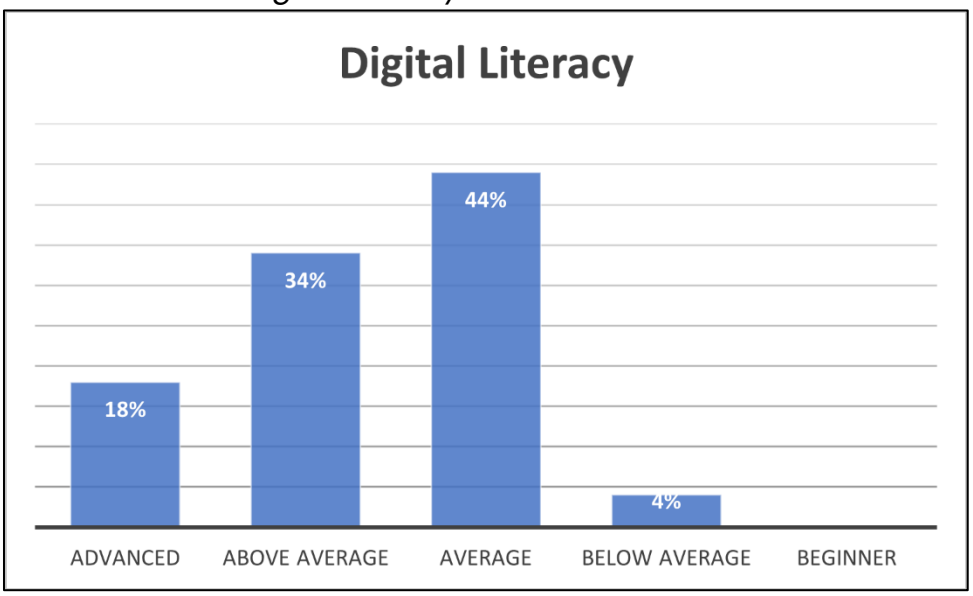


4.4. Teachers' Digital Literacy

The ICT skills and the digital literacy of the teachers were evaluated through their capacity to utilize the internet and various office productivity tools. The teachers' self-rating of their own digital literacy is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Teachers' Level of Self-Rated Digital Literacy



A considerable number of teachers (44%) rated themselves as "average", 34% "above average", 18% "advanced", 4% "below average", and no "beginner" in digital literacy. Where: a "beginner" means that one cannot operate a personal computer at all; a "below average" means that one can perform basic computer operation limited only to encoding and printing word documents, and writing emails; an "average" means one can utilize basic office productivity tools such as encoding and printing word documents, inserting and resizing images, working on spreadsheets but limited knowledge on formulas and functions, creating simple presentations, inserting videos, browsing the internet, and writing emails with attachments; an "above average" means possessing all the abilities of that an average adding video editing and embedding elements to a document or presentation, and insert advance formula and functions on spreadsheets; and an "advanced" means that one possesses all the competencies of an above average while having the ability to write a program, create websites, and troubleshoot common computer problems.

4.5. Cost

The property custodian was consulted to determine the expenses on the school supplies and the cost on utilities, i.e.: power consumption, water, internet and others, in school operations. It was found out that there was no significant change in the expenses for utilities while the school supplies increased by an estimate of 120% compared to the previous school year. However, the increase in expenses for school supplies was compensated as additional charges to the students.

The above-presented data, however, are raw and subject to further data-analysis procedures which will be discussed further in the next section of this paper for conclusion and suggestions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The advancement of digital technology rapidly changes, significantly impacting the different aspects of life, including education (Rizal et al., 2019). As claimed by Luaña (2021) in a research study, the COVID-19 pandemic prodded the sector of education to adapt to the changes and provide quality instructions without sacrificing the health and safety of the learners, teachers, staff, and other stakeholders of the school. While educational institutions employed innovative ways and means to deliver alternative forms of learning other than the traditional face-to-face mode, it must be ensured that the quality, accessibility, relevance, and continuity of education are optimum.

The results of this study offer informative implications of the learners' academic performance; learners', parents'; and teachers' preferred mode of instruction delivery; levels of the teachers' digital literacy; and school operation cost. This will help provide insights for an informed decision-making and policies for school administrators whether to reduce, retain, or reinforce the use of digital technologies in the school.

5.1. Conclusion

The results suggest that learners were performing better than the previous school year. This implies that the implementation of the blended online-modular distance education improves the learners' performance as evinced by the increase in GWA and number of academic honor rolls.

While this study could not ensure the effectivity of the learning modules, Luaña (2020) contended that parents answer the activities and assessments in their children's module. This could mean that the learners GWA and academic recognition are not truly reflective of the children's learning. However, giving the benefit of the doubt, evidence shows that the learners perform better during the blended online-modular mode of education.

As clarified, it is assumed that the learners' and parents' preference were consensual and unanimous, thus, it is considered one set of data for this aspect of the study. The data suggest that learners and parents highly favor the traditional, face-to-face mode of education. This result could be attributed to the additional cost incurred by the school to their account, which was confirmed by the parents' responses on the online interview form asking for the reasons of their selected preference. This is in congruence with the claim of Lase et al. (2020) that learners prefer face-to-face modality of learning over distance learning.

Teachers highly favor face-to-face mode of education, too, as the data in this study further presented. This is consistent with the claims in a press release reporting a study conducted by UNICEF (Knight, 2021) and a report by Bauer-Wolf (2019). Reports contended that teachers prefer full face-to-face classes and are amenable with blended face-to-face learning. This can be explained by the teachers' inclination on favoring on the ban of gadgets

in learning, especially in the classroom, since such technology could be a source of distraction and decrease of engagement of students (Bauer-Wolf, 2019).

However, in this study, the researcher also aimed to determine if there is a correlation between the teachers' preference and their self-rated level of digital literacy. The two variables were statistically analyzed to measure the strength of their relationship and whether the relation is significant or not (Dahiru, 2008). It has been found out that there is a negative correlation between the teachers' preference in face-to-face mode versus the teachers' level of digital literacy. Hence, teachers with low level of digital literacy will highly favor face-to-face. Additionally, the results obtained a p-value = 0.32, which means that the likelihood is fairly significant. Albeit, it seems that teachers with lower level of digital literacy will likely favor face-to-face mode of education.

5.2. Limitations

This study, while providing significant insights into the use of digital technology at Medina College Grade School vis-à-vis Education 4.0 and the Technology Acceptance Model, is subject to several limitations presented in the succeeding sections.

5.2.1. Scope of Population

The sample population was limited to Medina College Grade School, a single institution. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other schools or educational contexts. The results may not reflect the experiences of schools with different technological infrastructures or teaching strategies.

5.2.2. Timeframe

The study's retrospective design only compares data from two consecutive school years, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. A longer study period might reveal more comprehensive trends and patterns related to the integration of digital technology in education.

5.2.3. Self-reported Data

Teachers' digital literacy and preferences, as well as parents' and learners' preferences, were gathered through self-reported surveys and interviews. Self-reporting may introduce bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their capabilities, preferences, or performance.

5.2.4. External Variables

The study considers learners' performance and preferences, and teachers' digital literacy, but does not account for external factors such as the home learning environment, internet connectivity, or access to devices. These variables can significantly impact both learners' performance and the perceived ease of use of digital technologies.

5.2.5. Technology Variability

The study does not explore the variability in the types of digital technologies used across different subjects or teaching methods. Different digital tools may have varying levels of effectiveness depending on their application, which may affect the conclusions drawn from this study.

5.2.6. Cost-effectiveness

While cost-effectiveness was considered, the study does not delve deeply into the long-term financial sustainability of implementing Education 4.0 technologies, especially for schools in rural or underfunded areas like Medina College, which could face different budgetary constraints in the future.

5.2.7. Limited Teacher Experience

The teachers included in the study had between 2 to 4 years of experience. The limited range of teaching experience might influence the results, as more experienced educators may have different perspectives on the use of digital technology compared to their less experienced counterparts.

5.2.8. Technological Evolution

The study was conducted during a period of rapid technological change, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As new technologies and educational practices emerge, the findings may quickly become outdated, limiting the relevance of this study to future educational contexts.

5.3. Recommendations

By acknowledging the limitations in the previous section, future research can address these gaps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of digital technology in education, especially within the context of Education 4.0 and TAM.

Based on the data and insights obtained from this research undertaking, the researcher strongly suggests to retain or reinforce the utilities for digital technologies in the school. The currently deployed blended online-modular education proved to be effective in alternative delivery of education as the learners' performance improved. The current restriction on face-to-face classes, however, is assumed to be temporary during the onset of the pandemic, the future of the education landscape will be overwhelmed with future innovations and advanced technologies as proposed by Education 4.0. Even when the classes will have to be resumed eventually, the dependence of the teachers and learners on digital technologies.

Even though the study presented more than double increase in the expenses for school supplies, this could be attributed only to the reproduction of the learning modules, since blended mode is adapted by the school. It is assumed that when the face-to-face mode is permitted to resume, the need for the school supplies required by the module production will likely to decrease, if not obliterated. However, the need to maintain and improve the present digital technology infrastructure will persist.

Whether the currently trending distance education that is reliant on digital technologies or the traditional face-to-face in the past will be the future of education system, the decision to retain or reinforce the presently employed digital infrastructure is no longer in question.

This study was conducted at Medina College Grade School, Ozamiz City, involving learners from Kinder to Grade 6 levels, licensed professional teachers in elementary education, and low- to middle-income household parents. The breadth of the scope of this

study entails wide and various limitations. Thus, it is proposed to conduct further study on different school settings and a larger number of participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The author discloses no conflict of interest for the publication of this article.

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Effects of Metacognitive Awareness on Reading Comprehension in English among Senior High School Students

Ryann B. LaBad, Michael Jade Y. Jerez, & Danilo S. Yolim
Medina College, Inc. – Ozamiz City, Philippines

Abstract

The paper investigates the effects of metacognitive awareness on the reading comprehension skills and scholastic performance of senior high school students at Medina College Science High School. The study used a descriptive survey method, lottery sampling to select the representative sample, developed diagnostic test questions based on the K-12 curriculum, used a table of specifications to guide instrument development, and hand-scored the test papers. It was found that female students demonstrated higher proficiency in various metacognitive reading comprehension skills compared to male students, that both male and female students only achieved a "satisfactory" level of scholastic performance across school subjects, despite the gender differences in reading comprehension skills, and that there is a significant positive relationship between students' metacognitive reading skills and their academic achievement. While metacognitive skills positively influence reading comprehension and academic performance, other factors, such as cognitive abilities, learning environments, and instructional methods, also play crucial roles. This complexity underscores the need for comprehensive educational strategies that address multiple aspects of student learning and development.

Keywords: metacognitive awareness, reading comprehension, metacognitive reading, metacognition

For correspondence regarding this article:**

**RYANN B. LABAD
Teacher II
Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades
Maningcol, Ozamiz City 7200 PHILIPPINES
ryannlabad@iaoeinc.org

1. Introduction

Metacognitive strategies play a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension among English language learners. These strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own reading process (Channa et al., 2015). Research indicates that metacognitive strategy awareness significantly improves students' reading comprehension skills and overall language learning success (Ahmadi et al., 2013). Teachers play a pivotal role in developing students' metacognitive abilities and reading comprehension skills at all educational levels (Channa & Nordin, 2014). Various taxonomies and models of metacognitive strategies exist in the literature, offering effective tools for EFL readers to improve their comprehension (Çakici, 2017). Implementing metacognitive strategies in reading instruction can help students become more reflective and proficient readers. Furthermore, incorporating these strategies into syllabus design and teaching materials can lead to improved reading comprehension outcomes (Channa & Nordin, 2014; Channa et al., 2015). Overall, the literature emphasizes the importance of raising metacognitive awareness to enhance reading comprehension in EFL contexts.

Metacognition is the capacity to examine how one handles thinking and feeling. This capacity enables students to recognize how they learn best and to develop self-awareness, which is imperative as they mature. Individuals who have developed metacognition can assess their thought processes and reframe their thinking to adapt to different situations.

Using metacognition, students grasp an understanding of the circumstances, processes, and strategies that work best for them. They may find that a method effective for one subject might require more time for another. Through trial and error, students succeed with some strategies and fail with others, learning to adjust and improve continuously.

Teachers can assist students in developing metacognition through various techniques. For example, teachers can provide knowledge on how the brain processes information and the effects of stress on these capacities. Encouraging students to identify what they do not understand and to face uncertainty as part of the learning process is also vital.

Instruction on metacognition helps students develop skills that make them more effective in their academic and professional careers. Better understanding of how they learn, remember, and process information leads to improved retention of knowledge. This capability is also linked to better memory skills, which are indicators of future academic success.

Dunlosky et al. (2013) explained that students who understand how they learn can create circumstances that facilitate learning. For example, learners might know they need a quiet room at a certain time of day or note cards for lessons requiring memorization. Conversely, they might know that writing requires a different setting or time allocation.

The importance of “learning to read” has sparked significant debates about optimal teaching strategies and materials (Suggate et al., 2013). Over the past decade, these debates have intensified as calls for school accountability have increased. Teachers are increasingly mandated on what, how, and to whom to teach reading (Afflerbach et al., 2008). This situation has led to a greater reliance on scientific evidence by educational leaders and

policymakers (Snow et al., 1998). Reading researchers now have a duty to use pertinent research to bridge theory and practice with coherent and valuable models for the advancement of reading instruction and assessment.

Current research in second language reading has focused on "metacognition." These studies examine metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and the relationship among recognition of strategies, strategy use, and reading comprehension. Strategy research suggests that less competent learners can improve by practicing techniques observed in more effective learners. However, few studies have explored metacognitive strategy training in second or foreign language reading.

Metacognitive reading techniques involve students observing their reading processes, including evaluating the effectiveness of cognitive methods used. These techniques may include planning how to approach reading, testing, and adapting based on purpose and time availability (Devine, 1993). Sheory and Mokhtari (2001) identified "support strategies" such as using tools like dictionaries, taking notes, or highlighting essential details.

According to Auerbach and Paxton (1997), metacognitive reading becomes efficient when techniques like working towards specific objectives while reading are effectively used. Carrell, Gajdusek, and Wise (1998) provided examples of metacognitive techniques in reading, including setting goals, evaluating materials, repairing miscomprehension, analyzing content structure, adjusting reading speed, and self-questioning.

A significant contribution of reading strategies is their ability to expand as a reader becomes more proficient (Anderson, 2009; Square & Pressley, 2007; Brown et al., 1999). The goal is to routinize strategic processing, allowing learners to reflect on a technique when needed or when being taught. Ultimately, successful methods should be used without requiring continuous conscious problem-solving.

The paper investigates the effects of metacognitive awareness on the reading comprehension skills and scholastic performance of senior high school students at Medina College Science High School.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The study used a descriptive survey method, lottery sampling to select the representative sample, developed diagnostic test questions based on the K-12 curriculum, used a table of specifications to guide instrument development, had the instrument reviewed and approved by the thesis committee, piloted the instrument on students in another school, and hand-scored the test papers.

2.2. Participants

The participants were Grade 11 and Grade 12 students from Medina College Science High School during the school year 2018-2019.

2.3. Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted to determine the proficiency levels of male and female students in metacognitive skills and to identify significant differences between the

two groups. Correlation analyses were also performed to examine the relationship between metacognitive skills proficiency and scholastic performance.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study regarding the metacognitive skills and reading comprehension proficiency of male and female students align with several related studies. Here, we compare these results with previous research to better understand the broader implications.

3.1. Proficiency Levels and Gender Differences

The current study found that male students demonstrated average proficiency in noting details in pictures, following printed directions, and understanding paragraphs, but below-average proficiency in other metacognitive reading comprehension skills. In contrast, female students exhibited above-average proficiency in many reading comprehension skills and average proficiency in others. This study further highlighted the main findings that female students demonstrated higher proficiency in various metacognitive reading comprehension skills compared to male students and that both male and female students only achieved a "satisfactory" level of scholastic performance across school subjects, despite the gender differences in reading comprehension skills.

Maqsud's (1997) research, as cited by Ur Rahman et al. (2010), supports these findings by highlighting the significant positive associations between metacognitive abilities and academic performance, with notable gender disparities in mathematics performance. Similarly, the current study's findings reflect significant differences in metacognitive skills between male and female students, with female students outperforming their male counterparts in most areas.

Pretorius (2002) also emphasized the importance of reading proficiency for academic success, demonstrating variations in reading skills across different academic groups. This study's findings that both male and female students achieved a satisfactory level of scholastic performance despite gender differences in metacognitive skills further underscore Pretorious' conclusion about the critical role of reading proficiency in academic outcomes.

Recent studies have highlighted gender differences in reading comprehension and metacognitive skills. Witri & Ansyari (2022) found that female students outperformed males in reading comprehension, with mean scores of 70.13 and 61.87 respectively. Koyuncu et al. (2022) observed that socioeconomic status (SES) moderated the relationship between metacognitive skills and reading performance, with gender differences more pronounced in higher SES groups. Muhid et al. (2020) demonstrated that metacognitive strategies had a significant positive effect on students' reading achievement. These findings align with Heit's (2011) hypothesis that students with greater use of metacognitive strategies show better performance in language and literature. Factors influencing reading comprehension varied between genders, with males being more influenced by social environment and talent, while females were more affected by motivation (Witri & Ansyari, 2022). These studies collectively

emphasize the importance of considering gender, SES, and metacognitive strategies in understanding and improving reading comprehension skills.

3.2. Relationship with Scholastic Performance

This study found that there is a significant positive relationship between students' metacognitive reading skills and their academic achievement.

Both the current study and Taboada & Rutherford's (2011) formative experiment indicate that metacognitive strategies significantly impact students' reading comprehension and academic achievement. The significant positive correlation found between metacognitive skills and scholastic performance in this study aligns with Taboada & Rutherford's findings that instructional frameworks targeting metacognitive strategies can enhance reading comprehension and academic vocabulary, ultimately improving academic engagement and success.

Research consistently demonstrates a positive relationship between metacognitive strategies and scholastic performance. Studies have found moderate to significant positive correlations between metacognitive awareness and academic achievement across various subjects and grade levels (Khan & Khan, 2016; Sathish & Subramanian, 2022; Zulkiply, 2006). Metacognitive strategy use tends to increase as tests approach, with monitoring strategies particularly associated with improved test performance (Nett et al., 2012). Gender differences in metacognitive awareness have yielded mixed results, with some studies finding females outperforming males (Khan & Khan, 2016; Sathish & Subramanian, 2022), while others found no significant difference (Zulkiply, 2006). Urban students have been observed to demonstrate higher metacognitive awareness and academic performance compared to rural students (Sathish & Subramanian, 2022). These findings underscore the importance of developing metacognitive skills in students to enhance their learning outcomes and academic success.

4. Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research on metacognition and reading comprehension, highlighting the critical role of metacognitive skills in enhancing academic performance. It is very important to take note that, as the data suggest, the higher the proficiency level of the students in employing metacognitive awareness in reading comprehension skills, the greater the students will academically perform in school.

While metacognitive skills positively influence reading comprehension and academic performance, other factors, such as cognitive abilities, learning environments, and instructional methods, also play crucial roles. This complexity underscores the need for comprehensive educational strategies that address multiple aspects of student learning and development.

The significant gender differences observed in this study suggest that tailored interventions may be necessary to address the specific needs of male and female students. Educators should consider incorporating metacognitive strategy training into their teaching practices to enhance students' reading comprehension and academic performance. Additionally, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of metacognitive

strategies on academic success and to develop effective instructional frameworks for diverse student populations. Educators can support students in achieving better academic outcomes and developing lifelong learning capabilities.

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Conflict of Interest

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